

## Ecker writes to Hume: stop the sensitive lists

Ontario's Minister of Finance has written to Peter Hume, Chair of the MPAC Board of Directors, to let the corporation know that its practice of giving politicians and celebrities a free audit or "fine-tuning" before their residential assessments go out is not acceptable.

"It is very, very clear that the issue here is that some taxpayers may well have received treatment that is different than other taxpayers," Ecker said yesterday. "I think any perception of favouritism by MPAC is unacceptable. That's why I wrote to them this morning and asked them to look into this to assure taxpayers that everyone has been treated equitably and fairly. They have written back to assure us that an investigation is going on into the existence of that list and what it means and to make sure that no taxpayers have been treated unfairly."

Ecker made the comments under questioning in the Legislature from Windsor MPP Sandra Pupatello, deputy leader of the Liberal party.

"The people on this list for fine-tuning of their property tax assessments read like a Who's Who of who can make trouble for the government," Pupatello told Ecker.

"The agency is a creature of your government. You created it; you appoint the board. There's a list like this for every region in Ontario, and it's a list about damage control. You went out of your way to go over the assessments for the people on these lists with a fine-toothed comb because you don't want anyone with a high profile causing trouble for

you, but the rest of Ontario waits on hold while they complain about their high tax assessments."

The existence of the sensitive lists came to light Monday in a front-page story in the *Globe and Mail*. Other major news outlets followed the story. The Toronto *Star* wrote an editorial on it. The Toronto *Sun* and the Windsor *Star* covered it, as did the Canadian Press.

## Lists mask impact of downsizing, Casselman says

The use of "sensitive lists" is designed to mask the effects of the recent mass downsizing at MPAC, OPSEU president Leah Casselman says.

"This practice is designed to ensure that no politician ever has a personal experience with the level of service that regular taxpayers can expect from an organization that has lost over 800 front-line staff," Casselman said in a news release.

There were 2,164 employees in the OPSEU bargaining unit at MPAC in mid-1998. By mid-2002, that number had dropped to just 1,353. Still more layoffs are expected in the next few months. And since 2001, the Assessment Act now requires MPAC to assess every property in the province every year, not every four years as was generally the case in the past.

"No reasonable person would believe that MPAC can do four times the work with just over half the staff," said Casselman. "Of the 525 bargaining units we represent, I don't think we've seen one that wiped out so many people but still expected the survivors to do not only the same work, but much more," she said.

# Campaign on a roll

## *Resolutions hit 52 as Kitchener, Waterloo sign on*

Municipalities across Ontario continue to tell Finance Minister Janet Ecker their concerns about the quality of assessment services in the wake of the mass layoffs and restructuring at MPAC. Resolutions passed last night by the City of Kitchener and the City of Waterloo bring the number of municipalities who are angry about the deterioration of services at the drastically downsized MPAC to 52. The list below shows municipalities reported to have passed resolutions; an asterisk (\*) indicates that OPSEU has received a report from a member but **not** documentation from the municipality. **Members note: If you know of resolutions that have passed, make sure they are forwarded to Tina Furman at OPSEU Head Office, by fax at (416) 448-7451 or by mail at 100 Lesmill Road, Toronto, Ontario M3B 3P8.**

The following municipalities have passed a resolution in support of quality assessment services and forwarded it to Finance Minister Janet Ecker:

### **Resolutions reported passed**

1. Twp. of Johnson
2. Twp. Of Laird\*
3. Twp. Of Prince
4. City of Elliot Lake
5. Town of Bruce Mines
6. Twp. of Dubreuilville
7. Plummer Additional
8. Village of Hilton Beach
9. Twp. of Hornepayne
10. Michipicoten Twp.
11. City of Kawartha Lakes
12. City of Welland
13. Town of Pelham
14. City of Thorold
15. City of Thunder Bay\*
16. City of Sault Ste. Marie
17. Municipality of Whitestone
18. Twp. of Bonfield
19. Twp. of Ryerson
20. Twp. of Joly
21. Front of Yonge Twp.
22. Town of New Liskeard
23. Twp. of Southgate
24. Twp. of Leeds and the Thousand Islands
25. Twp. of Coleman
26. Twp. of Armour
27. Twp. of Chisholm
28. Twp. of Dorion
29. Municipality of Moonbeam
30. Peterborough County\*
31. Twp. of Black River – Matheson
32. Twp. of Macdonald, Meredith & Aberdeen Add'l
33. City of Hamilton
34. Township of St. Joseph
35. Bradford West Gwillimbury
36. City of Windsor
37. Town of Tecumseh
38. County of Haliburton
39. Township of Callander\*
40. Township of Algonquin Highlands
41. Township of Minden Hills\*
42. Township of Dysart et al\*
43. Municipality of Highlands East\*
44. Township of McDougall\*
45. Township of Opasatika
46. City of Kitchener\*
47. City of Waterloo\*
48. Municipality of Oliver-Paipoonge
49. Town of Essex
50. Town of Thessalon
51. Town of Lakeshore
52. Township of Jocelyn

## Now that's an unhappy Treasurer

Susan Turnbull is not happy.

The Treasurer of the Town of Bradford West Gwillimbury, south of Barrie, did not want to comment on a letter she received from OPSEU Local 322. "They make many allegations," she said in a report to Town Council; "most I am unable to comment on."

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What she did say was pretty amazing. Some 170 properties that are new in 2002 did not make it on to the town's assessment roll. Neither did some properties that were occupied in 2001. Owners of those properties will have to pay three years' taxes – likely around \$7,500 each – in one year, Turnbull said.

What does this mean to the finances of a smallish community? "To my knowledge," Turnbull said, "this decision to delay adding new assessment to the roll was reached without any consultation with municipalities. **The estimate of the assessment that MPAC has decided not to include in the returned roll is approximately \$42,500,000 for Bradford West Gwillimbury alone**" (emphasis added).

Turnbull also slammed MPAC for cutting off access to assessors.

"Treasury staff has no access to assessors, unlike the past when a residential and commercial assessor were assigned to Bradford West Gwillimbury and provided a knowledgeable resource which was used on a regular (often daily) basis...."

Town council has forwarded Turnbull's report to Ontario Finance Minister Janet Ecker on Dec. 2 "to indicate to her the Town's concerns about the quality of assessment services."

## News online

Just a sample of the news coverage regarding MPAC over the last few days:

*Globe and Mail*: "Luminaries avoid property-tax ordeal" at [http://www.globeandmail.com/servlet/ArticleNews/PEstory/TGAM/20021209/UMURRM/Front/frontpage/frontpage\\_temp/1/1/5/](http://www.globeandmail.com/servlet/ArticleNews/PEstory/TGAM/20021209/UMURRM/Front/frontpage/frontpage_temp/1/1/5/)

*Toronto Sun*: "Tories listing badly" at <http://www.canoe.ca/TorontoNews/ts.ts-12-10-0019.html> .

*Windsor Star*: "'Troublemakers,' politicians on special assessment list" at <http://www.canada.com/search/story.aspx?id=29f60714-f915-48e8-9cb7-ffe4b5a226ae> .

*Cobourg Daily Star*: "Property assessment system failing" at <http://www.northumberlandtoday.com/webapp/sitepages/content.asp?contentID=15830&catname=Local+News>

## Keep in touch!

To keep in touch with your OPSEU bargaining team, contact the member responsible for communication with your office. For confidentiality, please use our home e-mail addresses, listed below:

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