

IPS to blame as MPAC grinds to a halt

Failed computer system has staff “frustrated and exasperated”

The Municipal Property Assessment Corporation can no longer perform the work it is mandated to do.

What should have been a simple change to the way assessment changes affect property owners – included in the 2008 provincial budget – has effectively paralyzed the organization. Many MPAC staff

worry that they are witnessing the total meltdown of a once-proud property assessment system.

And a large part of it is because of IPS.

“The Integrated Property System that went live three years ago has never worked properly,” says Ivan Herrington, OPSEU chair of the Union-Management Committee (UMC) at MPAC. “But now, because IPS cannot calculate the phase-in of assessment value changes, many staff fear that the organization itself is on the



brink of final, fatal, failure.

“Our members are frustrated and exasperated,” he said. “We have invested our careers into this organization. We care about the job we’re doing and we simply can’t do our job.”

The computer system at MPAC has essentially been “read-only” for the last while. Staff cannot change data for any property. They cannot resolve any Requests for Reconsideration, even though they are legally required to do so by Sept. 2009.

In other words, staff cannot revise the value of a property in the IPS system. MPAC is not able to complete any RFRs that require adjustments to a property’s value through IPS.

“What are we supposed to tell ratepayers?” asks David Lynch, chair of the OPSEU

Pay equity deal nets \$3.3 million in back pay

OPSEU and the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation have signed a Pay Equity Plan that will give union members retroactive pay of close to \$3.3 million.

The plan, signed last Thursday, will pay an average of \$12,000 to 228 current and former members in 17 job classifications for the period from Jan. 1, 2002 to June 25, 2009. In addition, eligible members who worked for the former Ontario Property Assessment Corporation will receive a lump sum payment

for the period from 1998 to 2001.

The plan raises current pay rates for all workers in the 17 classifications. Typical hourly increases are in the \$0-\$2 range.

One exception is the Intermediate Accountant position, which was underpaid by more than \$8 an hour from 2002 to 2007 and by more than \$4 an hour in 2008-09. The individual in that position will receive retroactive pay of more than \$112,500.

Continued on page 3

Continued on page 2

IPS to blame

Continued from page 1

Property Assessment Division. "Our members are left holding the bag in talking with the public."

Some assessment work continues to be done on paper, but none of it is making its way into the system.

Municipal tax collectors have begun complaining about how long it is taking to bring new properties onto the tax rolls and update existing values. But the bad news can only be kept under wraps for so long.

"With the 2009 provincial budget just weeks away, it is clear that MPAC is unable to deliver on Finance Minister Dwight Duncan's promise in the 2008 budget," said Herrington. "This crisis has big implications,

"A fish rots from the head"



This proverb first appeared in English in 1674 in John Josselyn's *An Account of Two Voyages to New England*.

Just one of many things you can learn by reading *OPSEU Impact*.

and we need to address it now."

The OPSEU leadership team at MPAC is calling on the Board of Directors to take immediate steps to resolve the crisis.

"The day before announcing that IPS was on the rocks, MPAC management decided to hold a province-wide pizza party to celebrate the 10-year anniversary," said Herrington. "CEO Carl Isenburg did a

webcast to tell us how great things are.

"What world is he living in? We are on the rocks, and it is all because of a serious failure of leadership.

"It's time to clean out top management and put people in place who are up to the challenge of leading a major organization in the 21st century.

"This company needs a fixer at the top, and we need it now."

For the record: What MPAC told the Ontario Ombudsman about IPS

MPAC has made a number of strategic investments to improve data quality. The Integrated Property System (IPS) is a multi-million dollar and multi-year project representing the largest single capital investment to date by MPAC. The primary purpose of IPS, an enterprise-wide Oracle database platform, is to improve MPAC's handling of data. The Ontario Assessment System (OASYS), which is currently used by MPAC, is 25-year-old legacy system incapable of meeting MPAC's business needs from service, data capture, processing, and reporting perspectives. With

the new system in place, MPAC will be able to store and retrieve data efficiently as well as run new automated audits that will identify data anomalies. This system has just come out of development and is being rolled out in a phased implementation this year. As a result of this initiative, MPAC will no longer be hampered in our ability to systematically and efficiently review our data.

— MPAC's March 2006 response to *Getting it Right*, the Ombudsman's report on property assessment in Ontario

Pay equity

Continued from page 1

The plan is fully retroactive. Both male and female incumbents, past and present, are entitled to retroactive payouts if they worked in any previously underpaid female-dominated jobs.

MPAC will provide each current or former employee who is entitled to retroactive pay with a letter spelling out the period of time their retro covers and hours worked.

At the end of 1998, the Ontario government divested property assessment from the Ontario Public Service and into a stand-alone agency known as the Ontario Property Assessment Corporation (later the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation). In 2002, a major restructuring of MPAC (known as "Futures") changed most job descriptions and pay, and a number of pay equity issues arose. Negotiations began in 2003 using a gender-neutral job evaluation process.

"I want to thank each and every OPSEU member and each and every OPSEU staff person who hung in there through a long and tedious negotiation to make MPAC recognize its responsibilities under the *Pay Equity Act*," said OPSEU President Warren (Smokey) Thomas in reaction to the deal. "This shows yet again the power of negotiation, the power of persistence, and the power of being a union member.

"Great job, everybody, and

congratulations to all the OPSEU members who are finally going to get the wages owed to them."

The MPAC Pay Equity Plan was negotiated by OPSEU members Jennifer Reid (Local 105), Craig Wright (Local 308), Tina Faibish (Local 552), and Alba Policicchio (Local 589).

The team was ably assisted by OPSEU Pay Equity Negotiator Ann Wallace.

A copy of the Pay Equity Plan, with pay rate increases for the affected positions, can be found at <http://www.opseu.org/bps/opac/Feb9-2009-PayEquity.htm>.

BRIEFLY

OPSEU response to pension report goes to Minister Feb. 27

OPSEU's Pension Liaison Committee is putting the finishing touches on its response to the report of the Ontario Expert Commission on Pensions.

"We are very aware of the concerns of all of our members who have felt the negative impacts of divestment," comments Nancy Pridham, a member of the Pension Liaison committee and an Executive Board member in OPSEU Region 5. "At MPAC, the split pension issue is a particular concern, and it is definitely something that needs to be fixed. We plan to tell the minister so in the plainest possible language."

Pridham's job was divested from the Ontario Public Service (OPS) 10 years ago when the former Queen Street Mental Health Centre became part of the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. In that case, OPSEU members stayed in the OPSEU Pension Trust, but

many members in the mental health sector face extra pension problems from so-called "Tier 3" divestments. That's what happens when workers who have already been divested from the OPS are divested again and end up working for a third employer.

The union's response to the Expert Commission's report will go to Finance Minister Dwight Duncan on Feb. 27. It will be available online shortly after at www.opseu.org.

The Pension Liaison Committee consists of Nancy Pridham, OPSEU Region 5 Vice-President David Rapaport, and OPSEU Senior Benefits Counsellor Shirley McVittie.

Pizza fails to deliver

Considering the hype around MPAC's 10th anniversary party held Jan. 29, you might have thought the food would be, well, edible. No such luck! In Toronto there were 25 large pizzas left over, which were raffled off by the local manager. Some of the winners declined to take their prizes home.

Continued on page 4

BRIEFLY

More 18-month rollover violations?

Article 5 of the OPSEU collective agreement with MPAC says that if a temporary worker works at MPAC for 18 months, and if there is an ongoing need for the work to be done, he or she must be converted to a permanent position, or a permanent position must be posted.

We are aware of cases where temporary workers have been let go after 18 months while other temporary workers with fewer months of service continue working in the same office doing the same job. This is a contract violation! If this happens in your office, please contact a member of your OPSEU leadership team.

Property assessment in China

There's no denying that China is a world leader in a lot of things these days. Who knew property assessment was one of them?

Larry Hummel, MPAC VP (Property Values) recently visited the People's Republic with fellow managers Terry Tomkins and Stephen Wang.

OPSEU Impact wonders, how does this help ratepayers and municipalities? With things falling apart here, how does MPAC have the time to seek business opportunities overseas?

Keep in touch!

To ensure a speedy response to your questions, your leadership team has divided up all MPAC offices in the province. If you have a question or a comment, please contact the member responsible for your office. Contact us by e-mail at work or at home, as follows:

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Please don't speed

MPAC has been very clear with OPSEU that the Global Positioning System (GPS) installed in company vehicles is "not a performance management [spying] mechanism." Nonetheless, some OPSEU members have been called into managers' offices to talk about alleged speeding. This could potentially lead to disciplinary action.

Please be sure to stay within the speed limit when you drive. It's not like there's any hurry to get back to the office to input data into IPS....

Don't miss the MPAC caucus meeting at OPSEU Convention

If you are attending OPSEU Convention this year, don't miss the MPAC caucus meeting:

Date: Thursday, April 23

Time: 12:00 noon

Place: Region 3
Hospitality Suite

Special thanks to Bill Henry, OPSEU retiree, for arranging the room location.