

Union lobby rocks Toronto city hall

It was supposed to last five minutes.

When OPSEU activists Tina Faibish and Peter Thachuk walked in to Toronto City Hall on Tuesday, Nov. 5, they thought they'd probably just read their presentation to the Administrative Committee and go home.

But four-and-a-half minutes into her presentation, council voted to let Tina keep talking. What followed was a spirited question-and-answer session that lasted an hour.

Councilors were flabbergasted to learn that properties owned by the giant Toronto Transit Commission are overseen by an MPAC manager in London and a senior valuation analyst in Hamilton. They were particularly alarmed at the prospect of losing tax dollars and angering constituents due to understaffing at MPAC offices. They were highly skeptical of MPAC's plan to do four times the work with half the staff.

Deputy Mayor Case Ootes, a member of the committee and the MPAC Board of Directors, was absent from the meeting, a fact that did not go unnoticed by the councilors present. Ontario's largest city pays \$26 million a year for MPAC's services, and on Tuesday its elected leaders didn't sound happy with what they're getting.

The committee passed a motion to refer the OPSEU report to the city's Chief Financial Officer and the Treasurer. The committee instructed them to meet with MPAC and tell the MPAC board of the committee's concern. The committee also passed a motion to inform the Association of Municipalities of Ontario and other municipalities of this action. The city's letter to AMO will include the OPSEU information. The Administrative Committee will revisit the issue at its meeting in December.

Send in your results!

The OPSEU lobby of municipal councils is getting off the ground province-wide; many members are contacting and addressing municipal councils, to good effect. Some councils have already passed our resolution to improve the quality of property assessment services.

To let us keep track of the campaign as it develops, send us the results! We need to know what councils you've contacted, what councils you've met with, and what councils have passed resolutions. Please report back to the team contact for your area (see page 3 for contact information). Please fax any and all correspondence from municipalities – including resolutions passed – to OPSEU Communications Officer Randy Robinson at (416) 443-1762.

Municipal officials critical of changes

Ontario municipal officials are not happy with the restructuring and downsizing of MPAC.

This month's issue of *Municipal World* magazine, read by 40,000 people each month, contains an article on the Futures program, written by OPSEU retirees Bill Henry and Ed Faulkner. The article quotes several municipal officials. Here's what they had to say:

“Prior to MPAC restructuring, our relationship with our local assessment [office] was very good.... Any information needed was

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Municipal officials... (from page 1)

generally provided right away or within a reasonable time frame. Since restructuring, I personally find that the level of service is not the same. The one-on-one contact appears to be gone. Information requested now can take up to two weeks or more for a reply.... Before, we were dealing with local issues with local assessors. Now these assessors could be from anywhere in Ontario and may not be familiar with local issues.”

- Gail Nisbet, Tax Collector, City of Guelph

“We always had an excellent rapport with the assessment program.... It was immediate and direct. We never had a problem we couldn't resolve.... As far as I'm concerned, they've gone backwards.... I call Pickering about my back yard. It just doesn't make sense.”

- Sandi Steuart, Manager of Revenue/Tax Collector for the City of North Bay

“We do have concerns about the accuracy of assessments as a result of staff cuts.... Everyone's not totally honest, and we don't catch everyone who puts in a new garage or pool. As far as I'm concerned, they're reducing the level of service on the assessment side of things.”

- Thorold mayor Robin Davidson

“Models are fine for doing mass appraisals of homogenous properties in areas where sales are actually taking place.... But in diverse areas, or areas where there are too few sales to establish a base line for the market, you have to be sure of what you're valuing. And that can only be done by visual inspection. I've never seen a computer walk up my street.”

- Floyd Jenkins, retired recently as Property Assessment Commissioner for the Waterloo region after 34 years in the field

“There is no question that MPAC's success is a direct reflection of the skills and professionalism of its staff.”

- from MPAC's 2001 annual report!

Demand-setting meeting goes Nov. 16-17

OPSEU members from MPAC offices across the province will rendezvous at Toronto's Delta Airport Hotel Nov. 16-17. They'll use their weekend to map out the demands for the OPSEU bargaining team to take to MPAC when bargaining starts (likely this December).

Registration for the meeting is from 11:30 a.m. - 1:00 p.m. on Saturday, Nov. 16 and from 8:00 a.m. - 9:00 a.m. on Sunday, Nov. 17. For more information about meeting arrangements, contact Tina Furman at 1-800-268-7376 ext. 717 or (416) 443-8888 ext. 717.

FOI request goes to adjudication

OPSEU is appealing a decision by MPAC to deny a Freedom of Information (FOI) request the union filed this summer.

The union had asked to see results of the Municipal Customer Satisfaction Survey that MPAC conducted in March of this year. The survey is believed to have gone to all municipalities, who were invited to respond using an Interactive Voice Response system.

MPAC turned down the OPSEU request in September; the union appealed. The issue will now go to adjudication by a third party. FOI appeals are handled centrally by the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario.

Why wouldn't MPAC want Ontarians to know what municipalities think of the service they've been getting? You'd almost think MPAC CEO Bob Richards and company had something to hide....



Keep in touch!

In the weeks ahead, keeping in touch with your OPSEU leadership team is only going to get more important.

To make communication easier, each team member is responsible for two-way communication with particular offices. If you have a question, a comment, or information the team needs, please contact the team member for your area. For confidentiality, please use our home e-mail addresses. Assignments and contact information are as follows:

- **Jennifer Reid (team chair, London office):** London, Brantford, Sault Ste. Marie, Sudbury, Little Current, Bracebridge

E-mail: queenvic100@hotmail.com

- **Tina Faibish (vice-chair, Toronto office):** St. Catharines, Barrie, Toronto, Mississauga, North York, Aurora, Scarborough (Milner)

E-mail: opseu534@sympatico.ca

- **Ivan Herrington (Durham office):** Durham, Peterborough, Lindsay, Pickering, Bancroft, Trenton

E-mail: iherrington@sympatico.ca

- **Jamie Stata (Owen Sound office):** Goderich, Owen Sound, Parry Sound, North Bay, Timmins, Dryden, Thunder Bay, Fort Frances, Kenora

E-mail: ajstata@aol.com

- **Peter Thompson (Windsor office):** Sarnia, Chatham, Windsor, Hamilton, Cambridge, Guelph

E-mail: pthompson@cogeco.ca

- **Bill Robertson (Kingston office, still assisting the team for now):** Ottawa, Brockville, Pembroke, Cornwall, Kingston

E-mail: wrobertson2@home.com

Grievance report

Grievances related to the employer's failure to provide adequate notice before laying off **contract staff** were heard at arbitration on Nov. 1. Under the resulting award, contract staff who were terminated and subsequently re-hired as permanent staff will have their seniority recognized for all days worked since Dec. 31, 1998. Contract staff who were terminated and not re-hired may present their case in front of an arbitrator on Dec. 18, 2002 **OR** accept one week's pay as a remedy to their grievance.

Hearings into the OPSEU policy grievance related to the interview process for **Customer Service Representatives** have concluded. We are awaiting the arbitrator's ruling.

The "no vacancy" **Office Administrator** grievances have been settled and the grievors notified.

We expect the **Drafters'** classification grievance to go to arbitration in early January 2003.

Authorized for distribution:



Leah Casselman, president