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Halton District School Board's J.W. Singleton Education Centre

Halton school boards blocked from renewing Education Development Charges bylaw

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The Ministry of Education is preventing the Halton public and Catholic school boards from renewing the Education Development Charges bylaw - a move that can result in the loss of millions of dollars for both boards.

The bylaw, adopted in June 2013, expires on June 24 this year, and the Ministry of Education has deemed its renewal a politically sensitive matter and has announced a halt until the new provincial government is sworn in, which could potentially take weeks, the board said.

Through the Education Development Charges (EDC) bylaw, developers of residential and non-residential projects are required to pay levies, which allow the Halton boards to purchase land for new school sites as well as put funds toward any remaining EDC deficits. Eighty-five per cent of education land costs are recovered from residential development and 15 per cent from non-residential development.

Halton District School Board consultant Jack Ammendolia, of Watson & Associates Economists Ltd.,

told the board of trustees on June 20 that the bylaw renewal blockage will result in a monthly loss of about \$5 million for both boards combined and approximately a \$2.8 million monthly loss for the Halton District School Board alone (about \$127,000 per day).

Halton District School Board chair Andréa Grebenc is calling the situation a crisis and says it will have a direct impact on students from both boards.

"The information that is coming to us personally makes me angry. I can't believe that the Ministry of Education would deprive us of the ability to purchase land and to have us drain our coffers for political reasons, on whim," she said.

"We are heading into the construction season. We are going to be losing millions of dollars. This could delay schools. Could this affect our classrooms? Yes."

Ammendolia said the situation is unprecedented and he wants to reassure the board that all requirements have been met for the bylaw to be passed, save for approval.

"I want the board to be confident that we exceeded what we were supposed to do," Ammendolia said, adding that up until last week, there was no indication of any issues regarding the bylaw renewal.

Trustees are asking for Halton residents to reach out to their local MPPs in an effort to expedite this process.

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- Andréa Grebenc,
Halton District School Board chair