

REGION PUSHES FOR BUSINESS EVICTION FREEZE DURING PANDEMIC

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Halton is fighting to stop businesses from being evicted for not being able to pay their rent during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Regional council passed a unanimous motion May 20 that urges the Ontario government to freeze commercial evictions for the duration of the province's declared emergency and up to 30 days following the conclusion of the order.

The resolution from Oakville Coun. Jeff Knoll and Mayor Rob Burton also calls on the federal and provincial governments to resolve barriers to participation in the Ontario-Canada emergency commercial rent assistance initiative and launch the program immediately.

"Unfortunately, every day that goes by there are

"We have downtown businesses that are basically going to be closing."

- Councillor Colin Best

more notices of possession placed on front doors of businesses," said Knoll. "They (provincial and federal governments) need to act, they need to freeze evictions, and they need to get the commercial rent program in play today and stop deferring it."

Knoll said he's been a "zealot" on this issue and has had pushback from landlords who say they have bills to pay too.

"Many landlords are very reasonable, but there are many who just are not," he said. "They need to not be able to evict tenants while we get this under control."

Milton Coun. Colin Best said he's heard some "real horror stories" in down-

town Milton about landlords who are unwilling to apply for the rent assistance program.

"We have downtown businesses that are basically going to be closing," he said.

The federal and provincial government rent program, which was expected to be operational by mid-May, will lower rent by 75 per cent for eligible small businesses that have been affected by COVID-19.

According to the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation website, the portal for landlords to apply is now set to open on May 25.

The initiative will provide forgivable loans to

qualifying commercial property owners to cover 50 per cent of rent payments for April, May and June.

The loans will be forgiven if the landlord agrees to reduce the eligible small business tenants' rent by at least 75 per cent for the three corresponding months under a rent forgiveness agreement, which will include a term not to evict the tenant during that period.

The motion passed by regional council emphasizes that Halton businesses are "suffering catastrophic losses of revenue" during the pandemic due to a reduced demand for products and services, or by being forced to close by provincial orders, leaving them unable to pay expenses, including rent.

It also highlights the struggles the food service industry is enduring, with Restaurants Canada re-



Torstar file photo

Regional council says Halton businesses are "suffering catastrophic losses of revenue" during the pandemic, leaving them unable to pay rent.

porting that 10 per cent of the country's restaurants permanently closed by the end of March and 50 per cent of those remaining are at risk of failure, partly due to their lack of ability to

pay rent. The resolution will now be circulated to all levels of government, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario and Federation of Canadian Municipalities.

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