

OMERS Bill will be costly, says Fogal

Wards 3 and 4 Regional Councillor Jane Fogal continued to sound alarm bells over the provincial government's pending legislation, Bill 206 at a recent town council meeting.

The Ontario Municipal Employees Retirement System (OMERS) Act 2005 would transfer much of the responsibilities—and increased financing—for the pensions of municipal employees in Ontario, from the Province to the local municipal government.

The McGuinty government is determined to pass Bill 206 next Tuesday.

Municipalities are concerned because the downloading will cost every taxpayer an additional 3 per cent on their property tax bills.

However, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, John Gerretsen, in a letter to Halton Hills Mayor Rick Bonnette, stated that Bill 206 would not (not was emphasized) impose any new cost or pension benefit on any employer or employee.

But Fogal sees it happening the opposite way.

"This has serious consequences to the property taxpayer," said Fogal. "Taxpayers are going to wonder what are we going to get for a 3 per cent tax increase. They're not going to really see anything."

Halton Hills, Director of Finance Ed DeSousa estimates that it could cost the Town about \$285,000, which equates to a \$1.5 per cent increase on taxes—\$13 to the average household. To deal with the impact, Halton Region could also hit taxpayers with a 2.1 per cent (\$335) increase.

"We're not going to be able to afford our own workforce, is how it's going to boil down," Fogal added.

She predicted municipalities would have to start contracting out fire services.

"You only have to see what's happening in the private sector when benefits get out of whack. Look at GM, look at Ford, and here we have our own provincial government forcing us to increase benefits, and then writing us a letter telling us that it's not going to cost us anything. That's disgusting."

In fact, the provincial government has refused to provide any costing figures on the downloading, and the Association of Municipalities of Ontario is filing an Freedom of Information request for that information.



Halton MPP Ted Chudleigh is supporting the municipalities' bid to have the transfer stopped.

However, a letter sent to area newspapers yesterday (Thursday) from Halton Regional Police Association (HRPA) presi-

dent Dave Atkinson said Bill 206 is "good for both policing and community safety".

HRPA administrator Paul La Course said, "Early retirement factors for police officers will cost employers and employees approximately \$364 a year. This is equivalent to a pair of eyeglasses and yet municipalities insist on pointing to exaggerated and inflated numbers."

—By Cynthia Gamble, staff writer

Town: Business as usual in event of CUPE walkout

The Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Local 73 has indicated it will hold a day of protest Monday with a strike to follow Wednesday in its campaign against the provincial government's Bill 206, dealing with the municipal employee pension program.

The Town of Halton Hills issued a statement late yesterday (Thursday) advising residents it will do its best to conduct business as usual.

Critical services such as snow plowing, and road sanding and salting will be provided.

Hockey and skating programs at local arenas are also expected to continue. However, the Town is advising all arena users to call the arena on the day of the strike for any changes.

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