

Legislative Watch

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Ending Mandatory Retirement in Ontario

On August 19, 2004, the McGuinty government announced its plans to end mandatory retirement in Ontario. The Ministry of Labour will be conducting public consultations with interested stakeholder groups in September. The consultation paper, *Providing Choice: A Consultation Paper on Ending Mandatory Retirement*, is available on the Ministry's website, <http://www.gov.on.ca/LAB/english/>, along with its news release and related backgrounders.

In June 2001, the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) released the paper *Time for Action: Advancing Human Rights for Older Ontarians*, which is available on its website at <http://www.ohrc.on.ca/english/consultations/age-consultation-report.pdf>. In it, the OHRC argues that mandatory retirement policies undermine the dignity of older workers. They recommended a change of the definition of age in the Ontario Human Rights Code ("the Code") to end mandatory retirement at age 65. If implemented this change would mean that a person's age could not be used to determine when they have to leave the workforce.

On April 30, 2003, the Government of Ontario, then led by Premier Ernie Eves, announced plans to end mandatory retirement, but the legislation was defeated before it could be passed.

Ontario is one of the four remaining provinces in Canada, along with British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Newfoundland and Labrador, which still have mandatory retirement, which means that employers can require employees to retire at age 65 and employees cannot challenge this.

The Ministry of Labour's consultation paper is intended to promote discussion on the economic impacts that ending mandatory retirement may have. Some specific issues that the Ministry is reviewing whether or not ending mandatory retirement will effect/reduce the skilled trades shortage; its effect on drug plans and benefits; among other issues. The consultation paper has been divided into six areas: economic impacts, labour market issues, employment issues, pensions and benefits, social and human rights issues, and occupational and sector specific issues.

Consultations will take place in:

- Toronto – September 8 and 30
- Hamilton – September 10
- Kingston – September 15
- Thunder Bay – September 21
- Sudbury – September 22
- Ottawa – September 23
- London – September 28
- Windsor – September 29

Anyone interested in making a presentation at the consultation sessions may contact the Ministry of Labour at 1-866-400-8355. Written submissions may be sent to the Minister of Labour on or before September 30, 2004.

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce will be responding to this important issue and urges its member chambers and boards to review the consultation paper with its appropriate policy committees and/or members, and provide feedback to the OCC as soon as possible. Comments can be sent via email to Rachel Kagan at rachelkagan@occ.on.ca.

DBRS Gives Ontario Power Authority an “A”

On August 17, 2004, the Dominion Bond Rating Service (DBRS) announced that it has provided a provisional corporate rating of A, which is high, with a stable trend, to the Ontario Power Authority (OPA). The complete news release can be found on the DBRS website at <http://www.dbrs.com/web/sentry?COMP=1400&DocId=144321>, and the complete report can be requested by emailing info@dbrs.com, for a fee.

The rating for the OPA is based on the province’s own rating, which is AA, and furthermore because the OPA has been created and proposed by the government and will receive its powers through provincial legislation and regulation. The provisional rating is slightly lower than the province’s because of the initial operating uncertainty of the OPA since the legislation has not yet been passed. Bill 100, *An Act to Amend the Electricity Act, 2004*, is currently in its first reading and the legislature does not resume until October 12. Secondly, there is uncertainty with regards to the regulatory process through which the OPA will recover its costs, including the timeliness of the recovery process; third, the province has provided no explicit guarantees, and lastly, because of the risk of political intervention in the OPA’s operations, given that the province will have a significant degree of control over the OPA, as outlined in the draft legislation.

On the other hand, the OPA’s creditworthiness is supported by the draft legislation which provides the authority with a clear ability to meet its obligations, including contract payments; second, because of its minimal counterparty risk given that its only direct counterparty will be the new Independent Electric System Operator (IESO) which is taking over some of the operations of the Independent Electricity Market Operator (IMO); and lastly, because the province has stated that electricity in Ontario is essential.

Dominion Bond Rating Service is a full-service credit rating agency and is respected for its independent, third-party evaluations of corporate and government issues, in North America. Credit ratings are forward-looking measures that assess an issuer’s ability and willingness to make timely payments of principal and interest

Greenbelt Task Force Releases Final Report

Today the Greenbelt Task Force, chaired by Burlington Mayor Robert MacIsaac, released its final report of recommendations to the Honourable John Gerretsen, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. The report and news release can be found on the Ministry’s website at http://www.mah.gov.on.ca/userfiles/HTML/nts_1_21609_1.html.

The task force’s recommendations may help the government in its efforts to protect environmentally sensitive areas and farmland while recognizing the other needs of a rapidly growing population. They also refer to the government’s overall vision for growth in the Greater Golden Horseshoe laid out recently in the draft discussion paper *Places to Grow*.

The task force reports that in total there were over 1,000 submissions prepared on the draft discussion paper and more than 60 stakeholder groups were represented at the consultations, including the OCC. On June 9, the Chamber prepared a submission for the task force's consultations on the draft discussion paper, which can be found on the OCC website at http://occ.on.ca/2policysubmissions/Greenbelt_06092004.pdf.

In its report, the Task Force provides recommendations on how to identify land for protection from development:

- Ontario's natural heritage;
- Sensitive environmental areas;
- Vital agricultural communities;
- Natural resources; and
- Opportunities for tourism, recreation and experiencing cultural heritage.

The government will release its detailed draft plan to establish a permanent greenbelt in the fall. The OCC is currently reviewing the report and will respond accordingly. We welcome any comments or input member chambers and boards may have, please send them to Rachel Kagan at rachelkagan@occ.on.ca.

OBAA Awards Nominations Deadline Quickly Approaching

Thank you to all the chambers and boards who have already submitted their nominations for this year's Outstanding Business Achievement Awards (OBAA) Gala Dinner recognizing business excellence in Ontario. The dinner will take place on November 10, 2004 at the Metro Toronto Convention Centre. In order to continue to publicly recognize the excellent businesses and entrepreneurial spirit in Ontario, local chambers of commerce and boards of trade are requested to send in their nominations by **August 31, 2004**.

Four OBAA awards will be presented to those businesses whose achievements in sales, innovation, entrepreneurship, and overall business excellence and acumen.

The Community Export Development Award recognizes a community – as represented by a chamber of commerce, board of trade, or business development organization – that has successfully created an environment which fosters business and export development.

The Bell Innovation Technology Award recognizes Ontario businesses that have demonstrated excellence in innovation, adaptability, and the successful application of new technology to the development & growth of their products and/or services.

Additionally, the OCC is very excited to present two new awards at this year's OBAA. The Skills Development Award will recognize business excellence in the area of skills development and training, and the Corporate Governance Award will honour an Ontario business that has demonstrated an outstanding commitment in the area of corporate governance.

To view the complete nominations guideline please visit our website at <http://occ.on.ca/2obaa.asp>. For information about the nominations process or about reservations for the OBAA Awards Dinner

Presentation, please contact Colleen MacIntyre via email at colleenmacintyre@occ.on.ca or by telephone at (416) 482-5222, extension 222.

Changes to Postal Service – A Request from the Prince Edward County

The Prince Edward County Chamber of Tourism & Commerce is looking for information on communities that have experienced similar changes to their post office and the service they provide.

Earlier this year the post office announced its intentions to relocate its operations to a new building, reduce the number of resident post boxes and replace them with community boxes and provide 1,200 square feet of retail space. The post office has not confirmed what they will sell in the new retail space, but they have intimated that they will offer passport picture services, hallmark cards and other stationary. There are currently two businesses across the street in the Prince Edward County that offer this same service. Other businesses are also concerned about what they may offer and the potential duplication of service being provided in this small community.

The other concern is that the new facility will reduce the number of post boxes available as Prince Edward County does not have home delivery service in our community. The plan is to provide community boxes throughout the town. Many people are upset with this because Picton is a heritage town and they feel the community boxes will be an eye-sore on the streets and they want to encourage, rather than discourage, visitors to their downtown community.

The population of Picton is 4,500 and has a vibrant downtown. As with many other communities similar to theirs, they are concerned about the revitalization of its towns and must look and carefully decide what is good for the community.

If other chambers or boards have similar concerns or issues they should contact the Prince Edward County Chamber:

Lawrie J. Ackerman
Prince Edward County Chamber of Tourism and Commerce
General Manager
116 Main St., P.O. Box 50, Picton, Ont., K0K 2T0
Phone: (613)-476-2421 / Fax: (613)-476-7461
Toll free: 1-800-640-4717

Health and Safety Inspector Recruitment

The Ministry of Labour is substantially increasing its occupational health and safety presence across workplaces in Ontario. In the next month it will recruit 100 new health and safety inspectors across the province. To view the advertisement for these inspector positions and/or to download an application form, please visit the Ministry's website at www.gov.on.ca/lab.

The Ministry is hoping for assistance from the business community by posting its link on members websites and by sharing it with other health and safety associates so they are made aware of these opportunities.

Interested applicants may also call 1-888-275-5892 for more information.

Contact Information for Publications Ontario

Chamber and Board members that are looking for information on receiving free publications, in particular *Ontario Parks: Nearby and Natural*, should contact Publications Ontario toll free at 1-800-668-9938.

Upcoming Events

Listed below are some upcoming events that may be of interest:

- OCC Borders and Trade Development Committee, August 24
- OCC Finance and Taxation Committee, August 26
- OCC Education Committee Meeting, August 31
- OBAA Nominations Deadline, August 31
- OCC Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, September 1
- Labour Day, OCC Offices Closed, September 6
- Governing Council Policy Resolutions Submission Deadline, September 8
- OCC Health Policy Meeting, September 14
- Canadian Chamber of Commerce AGM, Calgary, September 18-20
- Ontario Business Advisory Council (OBAC) with Minister Cordiano, September 22
- Ontario Economic Summit (OES), Niagara-on-the-Lake, October 6-7
- Outstanding Business Achievement Awards (OBAA) Gala Dinner, November 10
- Governing Council, November 19