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Today's News

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Date: Monday, May 29, 2017
Edited by: John Cannella (John.Cannella@ieso.ca)

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The Timmins Daily Press - Sat May 27 2017
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theglobeandmail.com - Sun May 28 2017, 4:21pm ET
Byline: SHAWN McCARTHY

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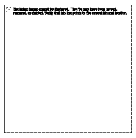

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Minister defends rate hikes; Thibeault tells Chamber audience soaring hydro rates were needed to rebuild infrastructure

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Ontario Energy Minister Glenn Thibeault said Friday he is ready and willing to face Ontario voters next year over the issue of soaring hydro rates because rebuilding Ontario's electrical system is something that had to be done.

Thibeault, who is also the MPP for Sudbury, was guest speaker at a business lunch hosted by the Timmins Chamber of Commerce.

Part of his speech touched on new legislature, Ontario's Fair Hydro Act 2017, which is due to be passed next week. A news released distributed by the minister said the act would result in lower electricity bills for all residential customers.

Thibeault said this would be a 25% reduction on average. People with lower-incomes and those living in Northern Ontario and rural areas could qualify for even greater reductions of 40 to 50%, he said.

Given that the Queen's Park Liberals have come under a storm of criticism over hydro rates, is Thibeault ready to face the voters of the Sudbury riding and the rest of Ontario in the next provincial election, in June of 2018? Thibeault said yes. "People will see and understand that we brought forward a plan that has brought forward 25% off on their bills, right," he said. "They've already seen 17% and now if this bill passes next week, we will see a 25% reduction on everyone's bills in this province by July 1st."

He added that Northerners are expected to get even more of a discount.

"If you're outside of the city core in Timmins or Sudbury and if you're a Hydro One customer or some of the other ones I mentioned, you can see anywhere between 40 and 50%."

Thibeault said the Liberals have invested heavily in hydro infrastructure since 2003 because prior to that, very little was done and the hydro system was "in tatters".

"No one invested in the electricity system, in (power) lines, in generation. We used to have to spend $700-million a year, just to buy power from the U.S."

He said Ontario did not have the generating capacity back then to meet its daily needs. He said that's when the government decided to spend the money to rebuild the hydro system in a bid to make it cleaner, greener and self-sustaining.

"So, yeah I am fully prepared and happy to defend this decision and the decisions that we have made in our electricity system."

He said regardless of what party was in power in the past 15 years, something had to be done to restore Ontario's hydro infrastructure.

"Every government of every stripe kicked the electricity issue to the curb. No one was actually talking about making sure you pay the real cost of electricity. People were freezing rates. Other parties were talking about we will do this or we will do that. But no one actually talked about rebuilding the system."

He added that Ontario had no choice. The province was experiencing power outages and rolling brownouts regularly.

"Some of us can remember being told as a business owner, please don't turn your air-conditioning on and shut your lights off during the day today, otherwise our system is going to crash," he recalled.

"And then in 2003, the system crashed. We had to make these investments. We had to."

As part of his presentation, Thibeault took questions from the audience.

Marc Lauzier, the general manager for Goldcorp Porcupine Gold Mines said mining companies often consider capital investments in Northern Ontario and that energy pricing is always a consideration.

He asked Thibeault to comment on the security of long-term energy pricing needed "to attract the capital investment for jobs in Northern Ontario."

Thibeault said he understood the importance of the issue especially for Northeastern Ontario.

"Yeah, I am the Minister of Energy for the province but I am also the MPP for Sudbury and mining is paramount for both of us that do live in our communities," he said.

Thibeault said the province still has the Northern Industrial Electricity Rate program, also known as NIER, which offers discounted hydro rates. While many Northern Ontario companies qualify for the discount rates, Thibeault admitted many do not. But things could change, he said.

"We are working hard and we will have some very good news, knocking on wood, in the very new future," said Thibeault.

"When it comes to long term energy pricing, right now we are working hard on the 2017 long term energy plan."

He said the government is still trying to get a better handle on where energy prices are headed this year, and whether the government can find more cost savings. He said savings so far have resulted in roughly a 4% savings for large mining companies.

Thibeault said it is his belief that in the longer term, there will be more savings.

"We're looking at again billions of dollars in savings that we should be able to have in place by 2021."

Thibeault also said Ontario should be proud of the current hydro system that is built and being improved on because it is a safe, secure and reliable system.

"Others have been looking to us to see how we have been able to build the system that we've built," he said. "Now my focus is on affordability and making sure that our large industries can continue to stay here and expand and grow and that our families are able to afford it."

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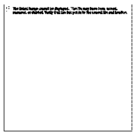

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Canada's green council launches industry standard for zero-carbon buildings; Non-profit developed guidelines for developers who want to market environmentally friendly buildings and for municipal, provincial and federal governments

theglobeandmail.com - Sun May 28 2017, 4:21pm ET
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Waterloo-based Cora Group broke ground this spring on a multitenant commercial building that will emit no carbon dioxide from its energy use and will actually supply surplus renewable power to the grid.

The Evolv1 development in a University of Waterloo research park is one of 16 construction projects that will participate in a two-year pilot of the Canada Green Building Council's zero-carbon building standard, which is being launched Monday in Vancouver.

The non-profit council - which also manages LEED certification - developed the voluntary zero-carbon standard to serve as guide for developers who want to market environmentally friendly buildings and for municipal, provincial and federal governments that intend to drive the adoption of more energy-efficient construction.

"This standard is intended to really push the market forward to innovate to deliver low - or zero-carbon buildings in Canada," Thomas Mueller, president of the Canada Green Building Council (CaGBC), said in an interview.

The zero-carbon standard will result in a "next generation of buildings" from those that are currently being constructed to LEED platinum standard, Mr. Mueller said. (LEED stands for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, and platinum is the top LEED tier.)

The CaGBC's zero-carbon standard - which applies to commercial and institutional structures - includes high-efficiency features to minimize the consumption of energy such as triple-paned windows, LED lighting and thick insulation. But it also focuses on the supply side by incorporating solar panels and other renewable generation on-site, and requiring the use of clean sources where off-site energy is required for heating or electricity.

Governments at all levels have identified the building sector as a crucial component of Canada's effort to reduce greenhouse-gas (GHG) emissions under the United Nations accord signed in Paris in 2015. Energy used to heat, cool and provide power for buildings accounted for 17 per cent of the country's GHGs in 2014.

Municipalities, provinces and the federal government are promising to adopt increasingly tough building codes over the next 13 years, to reach a zero-carbon energy standard for all structures built after 2030. Builders and developers have urged government to proceed cautiously with mandatory standards and Mr. Mueller said the CaGBC's voluntary code will help industry and government assess the cost and benefits of innovation.

In Vancouver, where Mayor Gregor Robertson will join Mr. Mueller for Monday's launch of the zero-carbon standards, the city has set a target that, by 2020, all new buildings should be carbon-neutral while emissions from existing buildings should be reduced by 20 per cent from 2007 levels.

Developers in cities such as Vancouver and Montreal have an advantage because their electricity grid is already largely carbon free, so builders can use power from the grid and still certify a "zero-carbon building." Alberta or Saskatchewan, in contrast, still rely heavily on coal for power and building owners in those provinces would have to purchase renewable power in order to be certified.

Cora's Evolv1 project in Waterloo won't need any power from the grid - but rather will have surplus energy from its array of solar panel and geothermal heat exchange. The family-owned development company is collaborating on the three-story, 100,000-square-foot project with the University of Waterloo; Sustainability Waterloo and EY Canada, its anchor tenant.

"Our objective is that we want to create a replicable, net-positive-energy building, meaning we are going to generate more power than the building consumes," Cora's chief operating officer Adrian Conrad said.

"We want to demonstrate you can do this with a solid business case. ... There is a slight incremental cost for doing this and we're going to be figuring what it is through the process. But our calculations are that it will be more than offset by the savings in energy.

He estimates it will cost $33-million to complete, with $3-million of that from the add-on low-carbon features. At today's electricity and natural gas costs, payback would take 12 years, which he says is reasonable for an asset that will last 50 years or more. And electricity prices in Ontario are expected to climb sharply in the coming decades, even as governments impose carbon pricing on natural gas.

By participating in the Green Building Council initiative, Cora can benefit from other developers' experience, which will all feed into the final version standard.

"We all learn by trial and error," he said. "What's great about the pilot program is that they're taking a number of projects and seeing what are the common threads, what are the common things we are seeing that you could be considering."

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Dams didn't release too much water, officials say

Ottawa Citizen - Fri May 26 2017
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The organization that oversees Ottawa River dams says it did not add to the flooding problem in Ottawa and Gatineau by letting too much water through its dams farther upstream.

Facebook reports have been circulating with pictures of low water on the river near Mattawa, about 300 kilometres upstream, and claiming this contributed to flooding in Ottawa and Gatineau.

But the Ottawa River Regulation Planning Board, which oversees the dams, says there was nowhere left to hold the torrential rain on May 1.

The board represents different levels of government and utilities on both sides of the river.

The problem is that dams upstream from Ottawa aren't designed to hold back water to form a significant reservoir, said Michael Sarich, the board's senior regulation engineer.

Yes, he said Thursday, it's true that water near Mattawa was low. But that doesn't mean that the closest dam - at Rapides des Joachims (known as Swisha on the Ontario side) could have held back more water. The dam is owned by Ontario Power Generation, but the Ottawa River board tells OPG how much water to let through.

If the Des Joachims dam allows water to build too high instead of releasing it downstream, that would flood Mattawa, he said.

"This is a question that we get every year. It's not something special this year," he said.

Legislation requires that the dams not make any flooding worse than what would happen under natural conditions, he said. That means that from Temiscaming through to Montreal, "as flows increase, dam operators continue to open their gates and essentially pass all flow that is coming."

Des Joachims is "tricky" because when water rises at the dam, it can block more water from coming downstream behind it. Engineers call it a "constriction point" on the river.

The water is let down every year in late winter to prevent a backup during the spring flood, he said.

"That water, if you were to maintain your normal summer level under highflow conditions, would allow water to back up (upstream).

"It's very simple in that water runs downhill. So if the bottom of the hill (water at the dam) is higher, it makes the top of the hill (the river near Mattawa) higher too.

"It would prevent water from coming down and it would flood Mattawa."

When heavy rain came across the region in early May, operators had to let water through the big dam to avoid a backup. That led to the social media complaints from people saying they should have held back the water to protect Gatineau and others downstream.

The dam is owned by Ontario Power Generation (not Hydro One, as reported in many social media posts) and regulated by the Ottawa River Regulation Planning Board. tspears@postmedia.com

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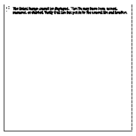

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Wasaga residents get pros, cons to selling electricity utility

Wasaga Sun - Thu May 25 2017 Page: 1

To sell or not to sell.

That's the question Wasaga Beach councillors will determine in late July when they consider the future of Wasaga Distribution. But for what appeared to the majority of the 700 people who crowded into the RecPlex on May 24 for a panel discussion on the benefits of selling, merging, or staying status quo with a local distribution company, the answer seemed obvious.

When Mark Winegarden asked the audience early in the three-hour session who favoured selling, a host of hands clutching red notepaper with the word 'No' shot up into the air.

The meeting, featuring an eight-person panel with varying perspectives on the province's electricity market, or experiences with selling or keeping a local distribution company was intended to give the public information on the pros and cons of selling or keeping the local utility.

Neil Hamilton, who spurred the 'don't sell' side with a petition urging council not to sell Wasaga Distribution that has garnered more than 8,000 names in the last six months, said he didn't believe the meeting changed many minds in the audience.

"Most of the crowd has made up its mind," he said after the meeting. "The majority of the town intuitively knows this is not a good deal."

Most of the more than 30 people who stepped up to the mic to ask a question or make a comment made their positions pretty clear, that selling was not an option.

"If something's not broke, don't fix it," Mary Bird said. "I don't approve of council selling our utility."

Norfolk County mayor Dennis Travale, whose municipality sold its local electricity distribution company to Hydro One in 2012 for $93 million, said that for Norfolk, the sale "was a win."

Travale said after the utility's debt was paid off, the municipality was left with $68 million it put into a 'legacy fund' that turns $2.9 million in interest back into community projects.

"It was a home run for our county and it allowed us to pursue projects that we couldn't otherwise afford," he said.

In response to a question on whether community activism, such as what's happened in Wasaga Beach, would have convinced his council members, Travale said he couldn't deal in hypotheticals.

"Councillors are elected to serve and make decisions," he said.

At the other end of the spectrum, Niagara-on-the-Lake Hydro chief executive officer Tim Curtis said there is still a place for medium-sized utilities. His municipality resisted selling the utility about a decade ago, and today has the lowest distribution rates in the province while paying a dividend back to the town of about $1 million.

Energy commentator and consultant Tom Adams acknowledged the issue will remain controversial.

"I have come to a jaundiced outlook on where the Ontario power system is going," he said. "Electricity is to Ontario politics what language is to Quebec politics. The issue will never go away."

Council will hold a public meeting on July 18 for comment on the recommendation to sell the utility. The decision will be made July 25.

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College building to be net zero energy user

The Sault Star - Sat May 27 2017
Byline: Brian Kelly
Page: A3

Sault College's planned waterfront Franklin Prouse Centre is being described as Sault Ste. Marie's first net zero energy building.

Power for the 5,000-square-foot property on McPhail Avenue will not come from the grid. Instead solar power and geothermal heat will be tapped for the new college site. Conservation is also a factor with the type of glass and insulation used.

President Ron Common heralds the waterfront centre as "a model" and "demonstration project" for Sault College students. Franklin Prouse Centre will be used for Sault College programs including outdoor studies and natural environment.

The building will be "a step ahead" of Algoma Public Health's neighbouring office on Willow Avenue that is LEED certified. The health care centre includes flooring made from natural products, rainwater collection vats used to flush toilets in spring, summer and fall and an electrical system that uses natural light and handsfree lights.

Vice-president academic Colin Kirkwood could not estimate how many kilowatt hours of electricity will not be used at the waterfront centre. Energy demands, he said, will be initially limited because Franklin Prouse Centre won't operate in the winter.

Fundraising continues for the $1.8 million needed to build the waterfront centre at the former RYTAC site. The college still needs to garner $180,000 in support to cover construction costs. Banks and credit unions are currently being approached, said Common. He wants ground to be broken on the building during the 2017-2018 fiscal year.

Naming rights for Prouse were announced in early May, but the retired businessman requested the amount he contributed to the project not be released, said centre fundraising campaign co-ordinator Alisha Boldirev.

Sault College plans a balanced $54.1-million budget for 2017-2018. Salaries and benefits stand at $39,095,000, or about 72 per cent of total expenses.

The college anticipates enrolment will climb 2 per cent in the fall, an increase Common calls "a very good result given the declining youth population in Northern Ontario and specifically in the Algoma region."

He anticipates staff will be hired for the college's aviation technology-flight program.

"There may be some very limited hiring in some other areas," said Common.

Sault College also plans to break ground on an early childhood education centre.

A request for proposal will seek an architect for the project. Common wants the centre ready for the start of the 2018-2019 academic year.

"We definitely want to get this thing completed in the course of this year so it's available for the September 2018 start," he told The Sault Star following a meeting of the college's board of governors on Thursday. btkelly@postmedia.com On Twitter: @Saultreporter

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