

January 3, 2013

Infrastructure still an Ontario focal point in 2013

KELLY LAPOINTE

staff writer

Infrastructure and politics will continue to dominate the conversation in the Ontario construction world in 2013 say industry leaders.

“We’re anticipating a provincial election in the spring and the commitment to infrastructure is an issue that we want to keep top of mind through that process,” said Ontario General Contractors Association (OGCA) director of government relations David Frame, adding that the OGCA is currently speaking with all the parties as they prepare for a potential election.

“Now (we’re) facing old infrastructure and having to run harder to put the infrastructure in place to keep up with the growth in our communities and the demand for our economy.”



The province needs a continued commitment to infrastructure, said Council of Ontario Construction Associations (COCA) president Ian Cunningham.

“We want to make sure that the infrastructure budget of the Ontario government isn’t in jeopardy and that the government continues its commitment to infrastructure renewal,” he said.

Infrastructure cannot be delivered in the way it has been in the past, says Andy Manahan, executive director of the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario (RCCAO).

“Overall as a society we’ve got to deliver infrastructure more effectively, whether that’s using different AFP (alternative financing and procurement) approaches or using recycled materials wherever possible, but how can we do things at a cost-effective way because we just can’t operate under the same business assumptions anymore,” he said.

Municipalities are starting to think this way and are looking at increasing their water rates, as they begin to understand the need to charging the full cost of operating their systems, said Joe Accardi, executive director of the Ontario Sewer and Watermain Construction Association (OSWCA).

He pointed to places like London, Ont. that are looking at using different types of waste charges for water, which will ultimately affect reinvestment in their infrastructure.

“At the end of the day, the vehicle is there to increase funding in the sewer and watermain infrastructure world, we just need to make it work better and we’re hoping that as 2013 comes around, regardless of who the (provincial) government is, they understand that the system has been working, it does need some tweaking.”

A way to move forward on this is the asset management funding that the provincial government will provide, which will be key in developing asset management programs for small and medium sized municipalities.

“You have to know how your system operates and what it costs to operate your system through an effective asset management program to really understand what the cost is and what to charge,” said Accardi.

Patrick Dillon, business manager of the Provincial Building and Construction Trades Council of Ontario, hopes that with time critics will see the value of the Ontario College of Trades (OCOT).

“They’re lobbying the government, they want to elect the government that’ll cut out red tape, that’ll cut down the size of their bureaucracy and yet they’re opposed to the College of Trades that does exactly that. It empowers industry to run its own affairs around trades training and yet the critics of the college want to grow the government to operate the trades training system,” he said.

Merit Ontario chair Gordon Sproule, who sits on the roofing board at OCOT, hopes to see more transparency. Merit Ontario is a member of the Ontario Construction Employers Coalition that is campaigning for the overhaul or abolition of OCOT.

“We would like to see transparency at all levels, right from the board of governors right down to these trade boards,” he said. “I think anything is possible as long as the participants are willing. If you have people that want to make sure this industry, all trades advance, then there can be that change.”

In 2012, Dillon was appointed as a labour representative on the Chief Prevention Council, which will work with Chief Prevention Officer George Gritzotis and labour minister Linda Jeffrey on improving the workplace health and safety system across the province.

Dillon is looking forward to making positive change in workplaces throughout Ontario.

“We have a bunch of strategic planning and a lot of work to do to understand the whole prevention system and all the components to align the system so you get value for the invested dollar in prevention. If that happens in the proper way with the right planning, I really believe that we will reduce the number of exposures and injuries that workers face in today’s workplace,” he said.

The OGCA also has worked on injury prevention. It has teamed up with the Infrastructure Health and Safety Association to introduce the Certificate of Recognition (COR) program, which provides employers with a health and safety management system to eliminate incidents, injuries and illnesses.

“About a quarter of our membership is actively involved in COR certification right now and that’s huge. We expect a majority of them will become COR certified in the new year,” said Frame.