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VINCE VERSACE

Ontario's Bill 8 will help govern how underground locate information is collected and shared.

Ontario's One Call bill due for another Queen's Park reading

KELLY LAPOINTE

staff writer

Bill 8, the Ontario One Call Ltd. Act, will return to the Ontario Legislature for a third reading.

The Standing Committee on General Government recently approved the [Ontario One Call Ltd. Act](#) with a few amendments to be brought back to Queens Park.

Opposition amendments include a provision for a call centre to be located in Northern Ontario, a five-day response time for members to answer requests for information and a name change.

The bill will now be known as "an act respecting an underground infrastructure notification system for

Ontario” as the original bill was named after a company, which is not allowed.

The amendment also places the responsibility on excavators to ensure the plan they submit corresponds to the actual location of underground infrastructure.

If passed, Bill 8 would establish a non-profit, industry-funded mandatory “One Call” call centre as the single point of contact for all underground utility location services in Ontario. Currently an excavator may need to call up to 13 numbers to locate all nearby underground utilities.

On April 23, a second set of presentations was made to the standing committee, including remarks from the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario (RCCAO), the Ontario Road Builders’ Association (ORBA), the Ontario Concrete and Drain Contractors Association, Ontario Sewer and Watermain Construction Association and the Ontario General Contractors Association.

ORBA president Jim Hurst told the standing committee that in speaking with their membership there was “an overwhelming response in favour” of enacting a mandatory One Call system.

ORBA pointed out that the summer construction season is right around the corner “and the potential for a continued increase in incident now is the time to enact this bill to ensure our workers and the general public are safe.”

ORBA also recommended a wide consultation process so all stakeholders have the opportunity to provide input on the drafting and implementations of regulations pertaining to Bill 8, if passed.

The Association of Ontario Municipalities (AMO) argued against the mandatory membership for municipal governments to be part of Ontario One Call.

AMO president Gary McNamara said it was unclear how the non-profit corporation will be held accountable and asked which ministry would be charged with the regulatory drafting.

He pointed to concerns that municipalities can’t be safeguarded from future fee increases or other membership requirements that could result in municipal expenditures.

Some municipalities say mandatory One Call could lead to a decline in jobs and local business but RCCAO executive director Andy Manahan pointed out that the call centre would not provide locate responses.

“Individual municipalities and utilities will still need staff or third party resources to provide locate information to the contractor or homeowner who is requesting the locate,” said Manahan.

“Furthermore, any incremental costs as a result of the provision of One Call will be more than offset by reduced accidents and superior damage prevention within that municipality.”

He said other concerns such as fee structure or transitional provisions for small municipalities can be dealt with through the regulations.

The construction sector, which tends to favour Bill 8 will have to wait and see if it will pass at its third and final reading at Queen’s Park.