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Proposed Ontario water bill will help improve efficiency, province says

VINCE VERSACE

staff writer

Municipal water and wastewater infrastructure and planning will become more efficient under Ontario's proposed Water Opportunities and Water Conservation Act, states the province as debate begins on the legislation.

"The proposed act would help municipalities improve the efficiency of municipal water infrastructure and services by encouraging municipalities to look for innovative cost-effective solutions to solve water, wastewater and stormwater challenges including water conservation, optimize systems and improve water conservation," said Helena Jaczek, parliamentary assistant to the minister of the environment, in presenting Bill 72 (the proposed act) at Queen's Park.

The Ontario Sewer and Watermain Construction Association (OSWCA) has said that the proposed provincial water conservation legislation will deliver efficiency and construction project opportunities.

Bill 72 aims to make Ontario a North American leader in the development and sale of technologies for water conservation and treatment.

It also encourages sustainable infrastructure and conservation planning, including using innovative technologies to solve water, wastewater and stormwater infrastructure challenges.

Encouraging municipalities to increase water and wastewater efficiencies is a "move in the right direction," Joe Accardi, executive director at OSWCA, told the Daily Commercial News this past June.

Up to 50 per cent of energy used by municipalities to power their water systems could be reduced by addressing various sources of energy inefficiency, according to a recent Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario report.

Toby Barrett, Conservative environment opposition critic, referred to Accardi and OSWCA during the initial debate on Bill 72. Barrett said Accardi continues to advocate for legislation and regulation to ensure dedicated reserve funding through a full-cost recovery model.

"There is one group of stakeholders. They've been waiting on this government for seven years now to do something on that front," said Barrett.

Jaczek stated that the creation of an integrated approach to municipal water infrastructure planning would help achieve long-term system sustainability.

The province would help municipalities identify and plan for long-term infrastructure needs. This plan would include moving towards a measures and targets approach to demonstrate progress in tackling leakage rates and system inefficiencies, say various stakeholders.

"Water efficiency is the most cost-effective way to generate water and wastewater capacity," Jaczek added.

“In fact, the cost of conservation programs may be as little as a quarter of the cost of new infrastructure.”

She cited the city of Guelph, in 1999, as an example of a municipality implementing a water conservation and efficiency program to help address growing water and wastewater infrastructure needs and issues. Investment in water conservation resulted in water savings worth up to \$7.3 million.

“Some forward-looking municipalities in Ontario are already planning for long-term sustainability and have developed their own forward-thinking water conservation and efficiency plans,” she said.

“They understand that water conservation planning saves water and costs, both infrastructure costs and energy costs.”