

No Vacancy (rebate)...

By: Sandra Dueck, Policy Analyst, Greater Peterborough Chamber of Commerce

Peterborough City Council has decided to do away with the Vacancy Rebate Program, starting with the 2017 calendar year. While this initially caused some concern, the Peterborough Chamber is encouraged by and supportive of the decision to redeploy the money set aside for the program to the Tax Ratio Reduction Program.

In response to a call for feedback on the City's consideration of changes to the program, the Peterborough Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors provided staff with a similar recommendation.

What is/was the Vacancy Rebate Program?

The City of Peterborough sets aside \$300,000 each year under the current Vacancy Rebate Program. The program, which has been in place since 1998 and is mandated by the provincial government, provides tax relief through a rebate of property taxes to owners of vacant commercial and industrial buildings. Currently, the rebates sit at 30% for commercial buildings and 35% for industrial, should the property meet certain requirements, including length of vacancy.

Why was the City looking to change the program?

Recently, the province allowed municipalities to start discussions and make changes to the program.

Several options were on the table:

1. Eliminate the rebate program in its entirety, beginning in 2018 for the 2017 tax year.
2. Phase out the program over a 3 year period:
 - Applications received in 2018 for the 2017 tax year to be processed as normal.
 - Applications received in 2019 for the 2018 tax year would be eligible for a rebate of 20% if commercial and 23.5% if industrial.
 - Applications received in 2020 for the 2019 tax year would be eligible for a rebate of 10% if commercial and 12% if industrial.
 - No rebate would be offered beginning in 2021.
3. Status Quo – no changes to the current program.
4. Revise the current program.
 - Potential changes that may be considered include reducing the rebate percentage, increasing the minimum period of vacancy and limiting the property types eligible for the program.

What was the Peterborough Chamber's response to the call for feedback?

After reaching out to our membership of more than 900 businesses, discussions at the Policy Committee and Board of Directors level, the business community believed there were other options than those above to encourage continued business investment in Peterborough and revitalization



of current building stock. As the Vacancy Rebate Program applied to ratepayers in commercial and industrial tax class across Peterborough, it was felt the redeployment of any funds should be city-wide as well.

Our members also wanted City staff to know that use of the program could be very helpful in certain cases and not a reason for building owners to keep space vacant.

What was the recommendation from the Peterborough Chamber of Commerce?

The Tax Ratio Reduction Program, which resulted from a coordinated lobbying effort by the Peterborough Chamber of Commerce, Kawartha Manufacturer's Association and Peterborough and the Kawarthas Association of Realtors, is currently set to meet its target of 1.5 times the residential tax rate by 2021. Our understanding was that applying the Vacancy Rebate Fund to accelerate the program will allow the commercial rate to realize that ratio a year ahead of schedule in 2020.

An added bonus to redeploying the money in this way is that it will

provide city-wide relief to businesses of all sizes and sectors and in turn create an even more business-friendly environment for economic growth in Peterborough.

What is the final approved Council Resolution?

- That the Vacancy Rebate Program be eliminated for the 2017 taxation year, commencing with the 2018 budget.
- That the \$300,000 budget for the Vacancy Rebate Program be redeployed to the Tax Ratio Reduction Program by accelerating the reduction of ratios for the Commercial tax class.
- That staff provide a report on a possible program to assist in the redevelopment of existing buildings.

While a number of businesses took legitimate advantage of the Vacancy Rebate Program, switching this funding to the Tax Ratio Reduction Program is more broad-based, benefiting all commercial taxpayers.

Win for Business with Suspension of Unfair CASL Provision

The Canadian Chamber of Commerce is celebrating the federal government's decision to halt the coming into force of the Private Right of Action Provision of Canada's anti-spam legislation that would have hurt Canadian businesses.

The PRA was particularly worrisome as it would have exposed business to potentially unjust and costly litigation. The Private Right of Action Provision would have allowed individuals to take legal action against any company which sent them an email they did not want to receive, without proof of damages.

"This is a big win for all Canadians. Businesses rely on their capacity

to communicate with their clients, and some of these measures would have limited their capacity to do this," said the Hon. Perrin Beatty, President and CEO of the Chamber. "Additionally, this provision would cost Canadians heavily in lost productivity and mischievous litigation," said Mr. Beatty.

For years, the Chamber has lobbied on behalf of its members to convince the government to re-examine CASL's damaging impact on Canadian business.

"We applaud the government's decision. And we are very supportive of the decision to ask Parliament to undertake a full review of the law" said Mr. Beatty.

Additional information about CASL and the Private Right of Action Provision:

CASL regulates the flow of e-commerce by requiring consent to send a commercial electronic message. However the law goes far beyond what most would consider to be spam and includes business to business messages.

Under the provisions, companies could be hit with \$200 in statutory damages for each contravention, or perceived contravention, not exceeding \$1,000,000 for each day.

While the balance of CASL remains in force, the PRA was not scheduled to come into force until July 1st 2017.

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Event Calendar

 **WEDNESDAY**
June 21st, 2017
(Chamber & WBN members only)

Cyber Securing Your Business

Chamber Boardroom
175 George Street North

12:00pm – 1:00pm

Speaker: Amy Simpson, MicroAge Peterborough 

Details: MicroAge will explain the top 3 methods hackers use to gain access and the 5 things you can do to minimize the risk and recover quickly if you do have an attack.

Cost: Free (bring your own lunch)

Sponsor: Bell

Note: Pre-registration is required; space is limited

 **TUESDAY,**
June 27th, 2017

Elevating Experiential Tourism With Cycling And Customer Service

Elmhirst's Resort
1045 Settler's Line, Keene



11:15am – 1:30pm

Details: Keynote speaker Howard Pulver from Bike ON Tours has compiled biking strategies and will share his experiences to show how working together can harness the growing potential of tourists to the Region. Panel discussion to follow.

Register online: peterboroughchamber.ca/events

 **Special Date!**
WEDNESDAY,
July 5th, 2017

PBX Summer Social @

Kawartha Lakes Construction



3359 Lakefield Rd

4:00pm – 6:00pm

Details: Join us to learn more about this custom home and cottage design/build firm.

PBX is a great opportunity for the business community, employers, consumers, and community agencies to make valuable connections.

Bring your business cards!

Cost: Free, courtesy of Shorelines Slots at Kawartha Downs

communities of Peterborough and the Kawarthas.

Pan-Oston will be the lead business in the development of an innovative supply chain collaboration that works with multiple firms and



Announcement at Pan-Oston Ltd

bundles complimentary products and manufacturers in providing a full package solution.

More: panoston.ca

Local riflemaker recognized for excellence

Congratulations to Savage Arms out of Lakefield on their award from Outdoor Life Magazine for the B17 Rifle.

"We were very proud to receive the award, which is specific to the rifle model," says Terry McCullough, Vice President, Savage Arms Canada. "The rifle is manufactured exclusively here in Lakefield and our engineering team also had significant input into the design."

This is the Lakefield plant's second product to win an award from Outdoor Life Magazine. In 2008, they won the Great Buy and Editor's Choice for the Lakefield-made Mark II-BTVS.

More: savagearms.ca

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The group at today's tour of the Darlington Nuclear Station with members from Ontario's Chamber Network

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1:58 PM - 9 Jun 2017

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