OCC AGM
POLICY RESOLUTION TEMPLATE

RESOLUTION TITLE: Supporting Ontario Contractors and Expediting Infrastructure Builds by Addressing the Backlog of Ontario One Call Locate Requests Through Adaptive Technological Innovation

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Co-sponsored by: Trent Hills Chamber of Commerce, Sault Ste. Marie Chamber of Commerce, Branford-Brandt Chamber of Commerce, Windsor-Essex Chamber of Commerce, North Bay and District Chamber of Commerce, Greater Sudbury Chamber of Commerce, Thunder Bay Chamber of Commerce

ISSUE

For any excavating of a new building, repairing buried infrastructure, landscaping, residential paving, building concrete slabs, or anything else that requires you to break ground, you must contact Ontario One Call at a minimum of five (5) days prior to your excavation.[1] However, contractors and developers who submit a locate request through Ontario One Call are being subjected to up to a three (3) month wait time to have a locate come and do the initial assessment process to allow the dig to move ahead, which is currently one of three steps. The backlog of locate submissions to Ontario One Call has further compounded the already growing barriers to completing projects on time—including workforce shortages, permitting and planning delays, which hinder our region's ability to remain competitive.

BACKGROUND

The Ontario One Call system is the primary method for identifying underground infrastructure prior to excavation and is essential for protecting public safety and maintaining the integrity of essential services. The backlog of locate requests in the Ontario One Call system has grown to unacceptable levels, causing delays and increasing the risk of damage to underground infrastructure and potential harm to the public. Uniquely, Northern Ontario has a very narrow window of opportunity to complete critical infrastructure projects vital to our region's economic growth and development, given our short summer season. Furthermore, the massive financial burden these delays bring to our firms can heavily impact the outcome of the project and our community's ability to encourage new investment in the future.

It was encouraging to see the passing of Bill 93: Getting Ontario Connected Act, 2022. The legislation facilitates major changes to how locates are delivered in Ontario, including a much broader use of Dedicated Locator services. It supports several operational improvements meant to remove barriers to timely locate delivery. The legislation also improves and streamlines the

[1] Contractors. Ontario One Call. (n.d.). Retrieved July 19, 2022, from https://www.ontarioonecall.ca/contractors/

compliance system, enhancing Ontario One Call's powers in this area. However, the challenge with the five-day turnaround exists not through legislation but in a lack of human resources to facilitate to a short window. In the ever-growing workforce deficit that does not discriminate by sector, the Province must consider how p3 partnerships or automation can fill in the gaps.

A city in British Columbia has recently adopted automation to resolve the locates shortages that provide tangible cost and time-saving measures. The City of Burnaby has been recognized with the Municipal Information Systems Association BC's Spirit of Innovation award for successfully automating its BC 1 Call "Dial Before You Dig" process, providing faster, 24-hour service to customers while saving staff time and money. Burnaby received over 10,000 requests through BC 1 Call in 2021, a vital resource for contractors and homeowners which provides schematic information on underground utilities prior to breaking ground on construction and renovation projects. By automating this service, the City expects to save an estimated $500,000 over a 5-year period while freeing up staff to work on other important projects.

Before automating this service, each request took approximately 15 minutes of staff time to process. Now, callers are provided with information within 3 to 5 minutes, and the service is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

Recently, Premier Doug Ford noted that Ontario doesn't have to reinvent the wheel and that we can look to other successful sub-sovereign nations and municipalities that have found innovative solutions to backlogs and challenges. In the case of the ongoing backlogs from Ontario One Call, it is prudent that the Government of Ontario looks to models that can be scaled for use in the Province while leveraging the private sector.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce urges the Government of Ontario to:

1. Work with Ontario One Call to address the severe accumulation of requests for locates and consider how P3 partnerships with independent contractors who can provide locate services can assist in moving these projects forward in a mutually beneficial way to all involved.

2. Explore ways in which adaptive and innovative technology, including the use of augmented reality and algorithmic-based response systems, further expedite infrastructure projects like what the City of Burnaby, British Columbia, has implemented.