
Subject: Bill 142 – Construction Lien Amendment Act, 2017

Report to: Corporate Services Committee

Report date: Wednesday, April 17, 2019

Recommendations

1. That Regional Council **ENDORSE** the recommendations made by the Association of Municipalities Ontario (AMO) to the Ministry of the Attorney General to consider the following additional changes to the recently amended *Construction Act*:
 - Owners should be provided more than 14 days to publish a notice of non-payment to ensure that due diligence is completed before payment of a proper invoice is required (e.g. 21 business days);
 - The time period between December 24th to January 2nd of each calendar year should be excluded from the calculation of time with respect to Prompt Payment and Adjudication;
 - The date for implementing the Prompt Payment and Adjudication regimes should be postponed from October 1, 2019 to one year following the establishment of the Authorized Nominating Authority (ANA); and
 - That the Ministry create and communicate practice guides, interpretation bulletins, and webinars in alignment with Recommendations 97 & 98 of the Expert Panel's Report to educate owners, contractors, and subcontractors of the new regimes;
2. That the Regional Chair **BE DIRECTED** to send a letter to the Ministry of the Attorney General to consider the recommendations made by AMO respecting the changes to the Construction Act; and
3. That Report CSD 29-2019 **BE CIRCULATED** to the local area municipalities.

Key Facts

- The purpose of this report is to inform Council regarding municipal governments' concerns with recent amendments to the *Construction Act* as a result of Bill 142, and recommend that Niagara Region join municipal organizations in support of the four changes outlined by the AMO.
- Of significant concern is that the necessary processes are not in place with the province, preventing municipal governments from planning appropriately for the October 2019 implementation.

- The Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks and Treasurers of Ontario (AMCTO), Municipal Finance Officers of Ontario (MFOA), and other municipal organizations are supportive of the changes outlined by the AMO.

Financial Considerations

There will be a financial impact for the Region to implement and comply with Bill 142; however, the magnitude of the impact cannot be fully understood until the legislation has been in place for some time.

As a result of Bill 142 amendments to the *Act*, there will be cost implications associated with updating contract language, adapting existing processes, and resources required to address prompt payment, mandatory adjudication, risk mitigation, and general compliance with the amended statute. Budgetary and accounting pressures are a factor as mandated payments related to adjudicated disputes will become due mid-project with short timelines for payment.

Staff will be required to develop processes and procedures to respond to new payment and claims pressures under compressed timelines. Additional ongoing legal and contract administration support will also be required to address an expected increase in contract disputes arising from the mandatory adjudication process. Additionally, depending on the yet to be determined regulations, mandatory surety bonds on public projects may also increase project costs, and potentially reduce the competitive pool of available bidders for certain types of work.

Overall, these potential factors introduce significant corporate financial risk to the organization.

Analysis

Bill 142 made numerous amendments to the *Construction Lien Act* (now titled the *Construction Act*), which affect the Region, its professional consultants, general contractors, subcontractors, and contract administrators. These include:

- Modernization of the construction lien and holdback rules and timelines
- Modernization of claims procedures
- Introduction of a prompt payment regime for all construction projects
- Implementation of adjudication as a new process to speed up dispute resolution

The purpose of the amendments was to ensure promptness and security of payment for suppliers of construction materials and services, and to ensure disputes are resolved efficiently to facilitate cash flows between contractors and subcontractors. The amendments are being implemented in three phases and can be categorized as follows:

(1) Minor housekeeping changes which went into effect December 12, 2017; (2) changes with respect to lien modernization, holdback payment, and surety bonding effective July 1, 2018; and (3) changes with respect to prompt payment and adjudication effective October 1, 2019.

Prompt Payment

Effective October 1, 2019, new legislation with respect to a "Prompt Payment" scheme will be implemented which will have an impact on the Region and the construction industry as a whole.

The *Act* will require that an owner (i.e. the Region) pay according to a "proper invoice" no later than 28 days after receiving said invoice from the contractor. Should an owner dispute the invoice, or a portion thereof, notice of non-payment must be given no later than 14 days after the invoice receipt date. If only a portion of the invoice is disputed, the owner is still required to pay any undisputed portions of the invoice within the 28 day time frame.

Staff are currently working to rewrite contracts and to define what constitutes a "proper invoice" in its contract language. System and process changes related to document management are also required to accommodate these changes. Considerations are also being made in the event the Region loses adjudications of disputes, as interest will accrue on any amounts that are not paid within the legislated time.

In addition, while the Legislative changes related to prompt payment outlined herein come into effect post contract award, the Region's Procurement department recognizes the need for a proactive and upfront commitment of resources to ensure that all associated templates (RFT, RFP, etc.) and contract documentation are updated to reflect the changes related to prompt payment, mandatory adjudication, risk mitigation, and general compliance with the amended statute. To ensure ongoing adherence to the overarching objectives of fairness and transparency, these changes will be incorporated and effectively communicated to the bidding community from the onset of each procurement process that is undertaken.

Adjudication

Also effective October 1, 2019, the Bill 142 amendments will come into force with respect to interim adjudication for construction disputes.

The Minister of the Attorney General is responsible for designating an entity to act as Authorized Nominating Authority (ANA) for the purposes of developing and overseeing programs for training adjudicators; qualifying adjudicators; establishing and maintaining a registry of adjudicators; and appointing adjudicators.

The party to a contract will have the right to refer disputes to adjudication, although adjudications are mandatory if payment is withheld. These disputes could relate to valuation of services or materials; payments under the contract, including change orders; disputes subject to Notices of Non-Payment; amounts retained as set-off; payments of holdback; non-payments of holdback; or any other matter to which the parties to the adjudication agree.

The adjudication procedures are set out in the *Act*, and will include a written notice of adjudication; selecting an approved adjudicator; exchange of documents to be relied upon at the adjudication; powers of the adjudicator; on-site inspection of work projects; and retaining of experts to assist the adjudicator. Strict timelines have been put in place (once adjudication is initiated, parties will have four days to agree to an adjudicator or the Authorized Nominating Authority must appoint one within five days; the initiating party then has five days to provide materials in support of its position; and a decision must be rendered by the adjudicator within 30 days of adjudication).

Liens

Liens are no longer attached to municipal property effective October 1, 2019. Under the current legislation, liens are not attached to crown property or municipal highways; however, if someone wishes to lien other properties such as a community centre, they can register the lien on title. With Bill 142, municipal properties are treated the same as crown lands. All liens are to be served by giving it to the Clerk; they are not to be placed on title. Staff will be required to develop processes and procedures to respond to new liens procedures under compressed timelines.

Staff at the Region have initiated a readiness assessment to identify the gaps and to develop a subsequent work plan to be compliant with Bill 142. Council's endorsement for these recommendations made by AMO and the associated risks as articulated in their letter will help ensure the Region's success in complying with the Bill while staff continue the work to be ready for October 1 or any other date the province may establish as a result of AMO recommendations and their endorsement by the Council.

Alternatives Reviewed

N/A

Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities

N/A

Other Pertinent Reports

N/A

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Appendices

Appendix 1 AMO Submission to the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly

Appendix 2 AMO Letter to Attorney General