



City Council News July 3, 2019

Transition supports

Contrary to misinformation being spread by people with their own political agendas, the Tolko transition team process is well underway and all of the resources that have been provided during past mill closure events are and will be made available to impacted workers. In fact, we're working very hard to learn the lessons from past transition processes and improve the suite of resources being made available to the workers who will be losing their jobs this summer.

Directly impacted workers have access through their union and through their employer to the information they need to develop personalized transition plans. They will have access to funding for retraining, assistance to find other work, financial planning support, access to the company's Employee Family Assistance Program (EFAP), and other wrap around services that are available from the Provincial and Federal Governments.

Workers who are permanently losing their jobs will be able to apply for Employment Insurance (EI) payments from the Federal Government and may receive severance payments from the company (if eligible).

A long-term weakness in the support systems that are provided when mill closures occur is that the small business community and the independent contractors who are also directly impacted by the decision to close the mill do not have access to the same resources workers do. This has always been the case, under any government, as private business owners are not eligible for the same support as hourly and salaried workers who pay into the Employment Insurance (EI) system.

The Transition Team is very alive to this issue and we're working with both levels of government to see what can be done (within the law, trade agreements, and financial constraints) to assist the independent owner/operators and contractors impacted by the current mill closure. However, it should be noted that any of the independent contractors' employees who have paid into the EI system are eligible for all of the government funded resources being made available if they too are permanently losing their jobs as a result of the mill closure.

The Transition Team is very aware that this can be a confusing time for impacted workers, contractors, and the community as a whole. We're also aware that the communications around these events is fragmented. We're working on this issue and hope to have a single point of contact to flow information to the directly impacted workers and contractors and the community as a whole.

Our main message to the Provincial Government at this time is that we need incremental resources and more flexible delivery of programs.

Too often in the past, “transition teams” would only have access to already existing programs; sometimes, but not always, with some enhanced funding or slightly more flexible application timelines. While this lack of true incrementality and flexibility has long been a frustration, it is a product of the need for both the provincial and federal budget processes to be transparent and accountable. The budget debate and voting process is designed to prevent politicians and government bureaucrats from misappropriating taxpayer money, so public funds get siloed and targeted to specific programs, inherently reducing flexibility and limiting the sitting government’s ability to add incremental resources outside the budget process.

Despite these constraints, we’re finding a refreshing and sincere willingness on the part of the Provincial government to address our local needs in a timely manner at both the political and bureaucratic levels. We also have direct and timely access to decision-makers at all levels, making this a truly collaborative and cooperative undertaking.

In short, everything that can be done is being done and everyone that needs to be involved in the transition process is fully engaged.

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