

How your provincial vote affects the services you depend on every day

You may not realize it, but how you vote in the June provincial election will shape the government services in your home town. That is because provincial laws and policies touch the municipal services that you depend on every day, like the water you drink, the roads you drive and even policing. They also affect how much they cost.

“It makes sense to review all the provincial rules and demands made on municipal governments, with an eye to making services better,” said Lynn Dollin, President of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO).

Did you know that besides providing daily services, municipalities also own about 60% of public infrastructure, such as roads, bridges, transit and arenas? But they collect only 9-cents of every household tax dollar. The federal government collects 47-cents and the province gets 44-cents.

Municipal governments look mainly to property taxes and user fees to raise the money they need to keep services running. And for funding big projects – like new roads, replacing bridges or building arenas – municipalities depend heavily on other governments, which have more of the taxing powers.

Growing costs and dire infrastructure needs have created an annual gap of almost \$4.9 billion, according to AMO, which represents almost all 444 of Ontario’s municipalities. Municipal governments don’t have many tools to bridge this gap. They can only raise property taxes, delay projects or cut municipal services to save money.

Only the province has the power to improve legislation, eliminate rules or give new sources of revenue for both big and small municipalities.

For example, municipal staff must file hundreds of reports to the Province every year – but only a handful are read by provincial staff. That time and money could be directed to public services.

A lot of municipal budgets are under pressure from arbitrated wage settlements for workers who can’t strike, like fire and police. Changes by the province could help ensure that what a community can afford to pay is truly considered. Then raises for emergency service workers wouldn’t grow at a much greater rate than other staff in the same municipality.

Another strain on municipal budgets is paying for provincial responsibilities, like hospital construction or recruiting family doctors to come to their communities.

“When provincial candidates come knocking at your door, you need to ask them how they’ll support critical local services,” Dollin said. “You especially need to make sure they won’t add to your property taxes by downloading new costs or responsibilities.”

AMO has developed a list of questions you can ask MPP candidates. Visit www.amo.on.ca/askthecandidate to learn more or watch the video at: <http://bit.ly/LocalShareLocalSayVideo>