



## Chamber efforts ensure property assessment complaint fees remain fair

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The Government of Alberta recently limited the amount municipalities can charge taxpayers to file a compliant against their property tax assessment. The move ensures the appeal system provides the widest possible access, while deterring frivolous appeals. The limit was placed after the Calgary Chamber and other business organizations raised concerns over the City of Calgary's recent changes to the fee structure.

Under the city's scheme, which took effect on Nov. 20, 2008, the property tax assessment complaint fees moved from \$50 to a charge as high as one per cent of prior year's assessment, with a \$5,000 cap. A typical commercial real estate property in Calgary would pay \$1,200 simply to initiate a compliant, and many retail complexes, spanning multiple properties, could wind up paying as much as \$50,000.

"If this fee structure continued, our members would effectively have no right of appeal as the fees would have been prohibitive," said Geoff Pradella, Vice-President of Public & Government with the Calgary Chamber of Commerce. "Small businesses would also have been hit hard, as any increase would be passed along to them in higher rental rates, increasing the cost of goods and services that are charged to consumers."

The Chamber was particularly concerned with the right to appeal as nearly 50 per cent of filing appeal fees were rebated to successful complaints in 2007, according to the Canadian Federal of Independent Business.

While the province's action was positive, the Chamber is concerned that the cap was interpreted by the City as not extending to business assessment complaint fees.

"The city's action runs counter to the intention of the provincial government's cap of \$650," said Pradella. "The Chamber and its partners will therefore continue to actively pursue this issue, and ensure the Minister of Municipal Affairs is aware of these developments."

The Chamber was a founding member of a coalition fighting the new appeal fees which included the Building Owners and Managers Association, Altus Group, Real Property Association of Canada, Canadian Taxpayers Federation, Canadian Federation for Independent Business, Canadian Property Tax Association and the Retail Council of Canada.