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Ontario Ministry of Energy, Northern Development and Mines (ENDM)   November 19th, 2020
Conservation and Energy Efficiency Branch
77 Grenville Street, 5th Floor
Toronto, Ontario M7A 2C1

Re: Regulatory proposal for province-wide implementation of Green Button

Dear Ministry of Energy, Northern Development and Mines (ENDM),

Founded in 1970, REALPAC is the national leadership association dedicated to advancing the long-term vitality of Canada's real property sector. Our 121 members include publicly-traded real estate companies, real estate investment trusts (REITs), pension funds, private companies, fund managers, asset managers, developers, government real estate agencies, lenders, investment dealers, brokerages, consultants/data providers, large general contractors, and international members. Our members represent all asset classes in Canada – office, retail, industrial, apartment, hotel, seniors residential – from coast, to coast, to coast. Our members' assets, both in equity real estate, and in mortgages held, is approximately $1 trillion.

REALPAC members own a significant number of commercial buildings across Ontario and have been proactively managing their energy use through programs like Ontario Energy and Water Reporting and Benchmarking (EWRB), ENERGY STAR, LEED, BOMA BEST, Race2Reduce, GRESB, and their own internal sustainability practices. Although our members are deeply committed to operating their buildings sustainably, one of the largest challenges related to their energy management is having access to reliable and timely energy data to inform their practices. REALPAC and our members are pleased that Ontario is planning to implement Green Button across the province as it will greatly reduce the time and administrative burden involved in energy management and will also help to further support conservation and energy efficiency in commercial buildings across Ontario.

Overall, REALPAC and its members are supportive of the province-wide implementation of Green Button, however, in order to be effective, we recommend that utilities implement Green Button consistently and that Green Button is fully integrated with EWRB.

Recommendation 1: Ensure consistent Green Button implementation by utilities

The proposal states that to implement Green Button, utilities would be required to procure from a third-party or develop internally a software platform; and obtain Green Button Download My Data (DMD) and Connect My Data (CMD) certification. With over 70 local distribution companies (LDCs) across Ontario, it is important that utilities implement Green Button in a similar way so that consumers, such as commercial building owners, with multiple accounts across Ontario and between different utilities, are able to easily access their data in a similar way and compare the energy consumption of their various buildings. We understand that some exceptions may be made for smaller utility companies (which serve less than 25,000 customers) and/or those servicing remote communities.

Recommendation 2: Fully integrate Green Button with EWRB

The proposal states that one of the purposes of Green Button implementation in Ontario is to support energy reporting and benchmarking by removing barriers and reducing effort/cost for consumers who need access to their data to comply with O. Reg. 506/18 and O. Reg. 507/18 under the Electricity Act, 1998. However, the proposal is not clear on how it plans to integrate Green Button with EWRB. To ensure that Green Button supports greater ease in reporting and compliance with EWRB, we recommend that:

   a.   Green Button data should be compatible with ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager

In order to comply with EWRB, energy data must be reported through ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager. Although Green Button provides energy data in a common format, it is unclear if it will be compatible with ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager. We believe that Green Button data should be able to be uploaded into ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager so that building owners can easily use Green Button to comply with EWRB. We understand that ENDM, Green Button, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, who manages ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager, and other appropriate stakeholders, will need to work together to make this possible.

b. <u>Building owners should be able to obtain aggregated site level data through Green Button based on EWRB ID</u>

Building owners that do not have operational control over a building's utility accounts have a significant challenge complying with EWRB. This is because under a triple net lease, as is often the case with retail and industrial tenants, the tenant pays all utility costs directly and therefore, the building owner does not have access to the tenant's energy data. Although we understand that there may be competitive information and privacy concerns with a tenant sharing their energy data with the building owner, if the building owner does not have tenant data, it can be difficult for them to determine the aggregated energy data of the entire building needed to comply with EWRB.

The proposal also states that since Green Button energy data would be in a common format, software tools and apps could support the aggregation of data for multiple energy accounts, facilitating building-level reporting for multi-metered properties. It is unclear if this statement is suggesting that it should be the responsibility of a building owner to aggregate all tenant energy data in a building for EWRB. We believe this burden should not be placed on the building owner as this energy data would be extremely difficult and time consuming to collect, especially in buildings with many tenants and where tenants may be reluctant to share this information with the building owner.

One way building owners have overcome this challenge in the past is to request aggregated building energy data from the local utility. However, the utility is also often hesitant to share this information if there are only a few tenants on site as it may be easy to estimate the energy usage of each tenant.

In order to get over this barrier, we suggest that through Green Button, building owners should be able to access the aggregated energy data for their buildings based on EWRB ID. If tenants are receiving their energy data from Green Button anyways, we believe that it should not be difficult to provide the aggregated energy data for the whole building to the building owner. This will help to avoid any privacy issues in obtaining tenant energy data and maintain consistent reporting site boundaries over time as per EWRB. We understand that utilities may need to work with customers to implement this.

c. <u>If necessary, Green Button implementation should be prioritized for EWRB sites</u>

If there are challenges in implementing Green Button across all utilities initially, we suggest that Green Button implementation be prioritized for EWRB sites (buildings 100,000 sq ft and greater). This will help ENDM ensure that Green Button is compatible with EWRB and that EWRB compliance is improved as a result.

CONCLUSION

REALPAC greatly appreciates your consideration of this letter and our view. REALPAC and our members are supportive of province-wide Green Button implementation. However, in order for it to be effective, we recommend that utilities implement Green Button consistently, and that Green Button is fully integrated with EWRB. We look forward to working with you on this matter going forward and we are happy to provide any further feedback you may need from the commercial real estate industry.

Respectfully submitted,

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