

Bill 66 undermines sound planning in Ontario

Ontario has come a long way over the past 50 years, particularly in the realm of regional environmental and land use planning. In a province with one of the fastest-growing mega urban areas in North America, it is critical for sound, forward-looking planning to be in place. Living in the Toronto GTA one comes to understand this well.

The recently tabled provincial Bill 66, Restoring Ontario's Competitiveness Act, serves to undermine and unravel some of the most progressive and respected regional planning in the world. The Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan, Lake Simcoe Protection Plan, Greenbelt Plan and Places to Grow Act all address key priorities in the Greater Golden Horseshoe Area of south central Ontario, home to almost 10 million people. Prime farmland is protected, sensitive waterways and natural features are preserved and enhanced, and urban growth is concentrated in designated areas to make efficient use of infrastructure and bring sound organization to land uses. Provincial parties and governments of all political stripes have contributed to these forward-looking plans.

The Greenbelt Plan, which was approved in 2005, covers the largest area of any similar greenbelt plan anywhere in the world. This visionary provincial plan, which seeks to protect and preserve prime agricultural land in a country with a limited supply of arable land, plus protect precious watercourses and other valuable natural features, has been decades in the making.

Schedule 10 in Bill 66 provides for municipal governments to pass "Open for Business Planning Bylaws," which provide exemptions to policies in major provincial legislation including the Greenbelt Act, the Oak Ridges Moraine Act, the Clean Water Act and regional and municipal official plans. Policies giving protection to viable prime farmland, drinking water sources and to sensitive environments on the Oak Ridges Moraine could be by-passed or compromised in favour of a large proposed development outside of settlement areas and urban boundaries.

Sound planning through provincial plans and municipal official plans provides consistency, predictability, effective use of infrastructure and serves to sustain viable agricultural land and healthy eco-systems throughout Ontario. Currently, there is abundant land in the GTA to 2041 and beyond with much of the infrastructure already in place which is already designated for housing and employment purposes.

Important to note, "Open for Business Planning Bylaws" can be passed with no prior public notice given and no requirement for public consultation. In addition, there is no right of appeal. Does this sound like a wise and fair planning process to you?

It is critical for Ontario to build and enhance the visionary planning regime and provincial plans established over the past five decades, and not open them up to the vested interests of many large corporations or individual municipalities. Consistency, stability and sustainability are all part of sound planning and are needed with a long term vision to preserve a healthy, safe environment and valuable prime farmland across all of Ontario, and to address projected population growth and climate change.

We can all play a role in sustaining the sound planning currently in place in Ontario and in providing wise stewardship of the land and water. I strongly encourage you to be active and to do your part. Here are some possible actions:

? Contact your ward councillor to express your concerns and to request that King Council approve a clear resolution that it will not pass an "open for business planning bylaw," as described in Schedule 10 of Bill 66.

? Contact your MPP, either Stephen Lecce (King-Vaughan) or Carolyn Mulroney (York-Simcoe) to express your views.

? Sign the petition being circulated by Environmental Defence. Go to the CCKT website: www.cckt.ca and then go to the CCKT Facebook Page.

? Write a "letter to the editor" or communicate through social media platforms.

J. Bruce Craig
King City