

King citizens provide input into plan reviews

By Mark Pavilons

King's stalwart citizens weren't shy about offering input and being part of their own future.

A Township staff-driven open house drew King's converted environmentalists, stewards, concerned citizens and business owners who asked questions and offered input into the 2015 environmental plan reviews. Back-to-back sessions were held in the council chambers last week, giving staff some focus on its submission to Queen's Park.

The province is beginning its 10-year review of the Places to Growth Act, Greenbelt Act, Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan and Niagara Escarpment Act.

At this point, the province is gathering input from citizens and groups, asking people to address pertinent issues and concerns. That will help them focus and give them a sense of direction during their review.

King staff noted residents were given questionnaires at the open house with six questions to answer. This will be included in the staff report to be submitted to committee of whole May 11. With input from council, the final staff report will be submitted to the province before the May 28 deadline.

Planning director Stephen Kitchen said the goal was to collect public input, so local concerns are part of King's submission. He did note that residents can provide direct feedback to the ministry itself. He reiterated that the province has not proposed anything at this point.

One resident at the open house said if residents are so inclined, they can go through the various acts line by line, and even recommend changes in wording, to better reflect goals and aspirations.

Input is vital and necessary, she said, adding this is our chance.

Kitchen was asked about future growth in King's villages and hamlets. While some growth is earmarked for certain pockets, it's not a matter of can they grow, but how.

A local business owner wanted to know how local businesses can be sustainable if residential growth is curtailed.

According to policy planner Gail Speirs-White, 56 people signed in during the evening session and staff was pleased with the attendance. They received 60 comments.

The six broader questions handed out to residents included:

- 1) How can the plans better support the long-term protection of agricultural lands, water and natural areas?
- 2) How can the plans be strengthened to ensure our communities make best use of key infrastructure such as transit, roads, sewers and water?
- 3) How can the plans continue to support the design of attractive, livable and healthy communities that are accessible to all Ontarians at all stages of life?
- 4) How can the plans better support the development of communities that attract workers and the businesses that employ them?
- 5) How can the plans help address climate change?
- 6) How can the implementation of the plans be improved?

The sometimes controversial Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe was adopted in 2006. It was designed to restrict where growth can occur in this part of southern Ontario, calling for intensification, mixed land uses and setting population and employment figures.

The plan sees King growing to a population of 34,900 by 2031, with some 11,900 jobs.

King Township and York Region both have a vested interest in the provincial review of this and the other plans.

King's current review of the Official Plan addresses Greenbelt conformity. The work undertaken in support of King's OP review will consider closely the review of the provincial plans.

The Greenbelt, which directs land use and division, covers 98% of King. It contains a rigorous set of regulations directed to the protection of the environment, water and agriculture.

The objectives of the plan are to protect against the loss and fragmentation of agricultural land from urban sprawl. The plan also supports a strong rural economy.

The Oak Ridges Moraine covers some 70% of King and the plan also governs land use. Any development on the Moraine follows strict guidelines and requires detailed studies.

This unique land formation is referred to as Ontario's rain barrel and protects ecological and hydrological functions.

The Township is asking that residents provide comments as soon as possible, and no later than May 1. You can submit your suggestions to Speirs-White, via email, gwhite@king.ca.

You can also submit comments through the Ontario?Environmental Registry at www.ontario.ca/ebr (registry #012-3256). Or you can email comments to the Land Use Planning Review at the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, landuseplanningreview@ontario.ca.