

King putting more teeth into response to Province

By Mark Pavilons

The updating of important provincial legislation is causing a lot of frustration among municipal politicians and planning staff alike. In preparing its response to Queen's Park on the review of the provincial Growth Plan, Greenbelt Plan and Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan, King councillors wanted the staff recommendations to carry a bigger bite.

The Coordinated Provincial Plan Review is asking municipalities and regions to submit their responses by Oct. 31 to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Councillors and planning staffers tossed around the contents of the staff report, but wanted to ensure the Province knows exactly the level of concern that King has. There's no reason to use kid gloves, so councillors asked staff to be more forceful in their recommendations, when the report comes back to council for final approval.

Councillors, staff and members of the public raised concerns regarding some of the proposed amendments to three pieces of legislation governing lands in King. The draft updated plans for the Growth Plan, Oak Ridges Moraine Plan and Greenbelt Plan were released in May and ever since, municipal staff have been going through them.

The amendments, according to planning director Stephen Kitchen, are "considerable," and include everything from infrastructure and supporting agriculture, to building and planning for complete communities.

Density and intensification "terms that have caused some consternation among municipal leaders" continue to add pressure. The new intensification target under the Growth Plan is 60% of all new residential development, up from the current 40%. It's also proposed to increase goals to 80 residents and jobs per hectare, to be achieved across the region. In urban areas, these minimums may be easily achieved, but in rural areas they simply aren't feasible (and likely not desired).

Growth targets include "major transit station areas," such as King City's GO station. As it stands, the provincial legislation would require 150 jobs and residents per hectare in King City by 2041.

Township staff noted it's been difficult for King to achieve current targets and the new figures will only compound the challenges. Adding this amount of people and employment to the village would place a huge strain on transportation and servicing infrastructure.

"A target of this magnitude would create compatibility challenges with the existing King City community fabric and built form which generally consists of relatively small parcels support one- and two-storey core area buildings, and low density single detached residential neighbourhoods," Kitchen's report noted. "... the proposed target of 150 residents and jobs per hectare seems beyond what would be appropriate in the context of the King City community."

Susan Lloyd Swail, former councillor and member of Environmental Defence, noted King City's GO station is not identified as a "mobility hub," but the Township has to think about how to respond to the provincial plans and manage growth.

The plans also ensure that employment lands are protected. King has identified such lands, but they are limited. Lands along Highway 400 and at the King Road intersection have been earmarked. The municipality needs clarification from the Province how these lands can be protected and developed in the long-term.

Another sensitive matter is proposed changes to settlement area boundaries. King's major centres "Nobleton, Schomberg and King City" are limited in terms of expansion and service capacity. Current development plans will bring all three to their limit within the next few years. Expanding it even further would be difficult.

A representative of five Nobleton landowners said her clients would like a clearer definition of "settlement area," since all have considerable investments in the hamlet. "There's a need for a long-term vision for Nobleton, she said, adding the Growth Plan contains conflicting standpoints that could impact Nobleton's future.

Mayor Steve Pellegrini stressed "it's all about growth," and while he can appreciate developers' interests, services in Nobleton are limited.

The revamped plans also include policies on agricultural uses. King has traditionally supported providing a greater range of permitted uses in support of agriculture.

The plans also call for modifications in terms of rural lands and recreational uses.

Councillor Cleve Mortelliti pointed out we simply don't have the infrastructure to support more people in King. He also has a problem with the Province forcing such things on municipalities.

"I don't know how we're going to accommodate this," Mortelliti said. "A lot of the provincial policies don't make sense and seem contradictory."

Kitchen agreed, noting while there are merits to intensification, King cannot support the levels being proposed.

Pellegrini added the Province is trying to create a one-size-fits-all strategy, but that simply won't work. Each community has to be looked at individually.

Councillor Debbie Schaefer is also apprehensive. She suggested King takes a more assertive stance and is very direct in its responses to the Province.

Councillors supported the staff report and recommendations in principle, asking they come back to council with stronger positions on some important issues.