

Bill 66 provides much-needed economic boost

In December of 2018 the Ontario provincial government introduced draft legislation, the Restoring Ontario's Competitiveness Act, 2018 (?Bill 66?). This omnibus legislation is being proposed for the express purpose of reducing regulatory burdens and cutting ?red-tape? for businesses seeking to enter or expand in Ontario, creating new jobs and much needed economic development of Ontario's industrial base.

One key facet of the proposed legislation is an amendment to the Planning Act that, if passed, will allow local municipalities to enact ?Open for Business? (?OfB?) bylaws. Any such proposed by-law is to be subject to approval by the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Essentially, where a local municipality can establish that there is significant potential for relatively large-scale commercial/industrial development creating a significant number of new jobs in the community, it can use its own bylaws and planning processes to fast-track the project approval process by bypassing certain existing regulatory requirements.

The King Chamber of Commerce (KCC) is the ?voice of business? in King Township. The KCC represents over 150 small, medium and large sized businesses in King Township, and has done so as the united voice of businesses in King Township for over a decade. The KCC supports the OfB bylaw provisions being proposed in Bill 66. The proposed provisions do not require council to act, nor can an OfB bylaw be enacted without ministerial approval. Rather, Bill 66 empowers local council, acting reasonably, with an important planning tool to attract, secure and facilitate significant economic development opportunities and much needed job growth in King.

It is also important to emphasize that the Planning Act amendments proposed in Bill 66 apply exclusively to commercial/industrial, and not to residential development opportunities. All of the existing rules and regulations, municipal, regional and provincial, pertaining to proposed residential development, will continue to apply.

As many are aware, King Township faces a significant existing ?jobs deficit? and is definitely not on track to meet the preferred growth scenario of 16,000 jobs (i.e. 8,755 new jobs representing a 120% increase in total employment) in King by 2041, contained in King's approved Economic Development Strategy Plan.

In King Township, opportunities for relatively large-scale industrial and economic development and the creation of new well-paying jobs for King already exist, in both the near term and foreseeable future. For example, in the near term there may be an opportunity to attract Toromont to develop the strategically located land it presently owns at Highway 400 and King Road. In future, there may also be opportunities to develop the strategically located lands at both Highway 400 and Aurora Road and Highway 400 and Davis Drive.

The strategic location of these employment lands contiguous to interchanges on Hwy. 400 provides King Township with a unique opportunity take advantage of infrastructure investments being made by higher levels of government. Further, development of the employment lands at the 400 interchanges would not, in our view, impair the movement of goods and people through our municipality in any material way and such development aligns closely with the recommendations contained in King Township's Economic Development Strategy Update (2018-22).

If Bill 66 is enacted, all three of these land parcels could potentially be the subject of a request by council to the Province for approval of an OfB bylaw. We are confident that council would only do so after public consultation and after carefully balancing the potential for economic development and jobs creation with the potential impacts on issues like the environment, character of the community and quality of life (e.g. increased traffic) in King.

In summary, the King Chamber's view is that the OfB bylaws envisioned by the Bill 66 proposals enhance the potential for future economic development and quality jobs creation in King Township while ensuring that Council maintains local control over all important issues surrounding economic development, land use planning and environmental stewardship.

What, we say, is wrong with that?

Tom Allen President King Chamber of Commerce