

Public wants consultation on ORM, greenbelt plans

By Angela Gismondi

A report on upcoming review of the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan and the Greenbelt Plan sparked a discussion at the committee of the whole meeting Jan. 13.

The purpose of the report was to brief council on the upcoming provincial review of the plans in 2015. In the report, staff advised council of York Region's intent provide a submission to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing on behalf of itself and its local municipalities prior to the beginning of the 2015 review. As part of the process, Township staff decided to participate in the Regional initiative, which includes a stakeholder meeting on Jan. 30.

All participating municipalities were asked to prepare and submit a report in advance of the meeting but the Township asked for an extension in order to be able to present the report to council and make the comments public before meeting at the end of the month. Staff informed council and the public that the comments on the plans are preliminary and will continue to be refined in preparation for participating in the province's 2015 review, but residents were not pleased.

Concerned citizens who came out to the meeting stated that a public consultation process should have taken place before the report was prepared so that the report reflects public input, comments and views.

‘What is significantly lacking here is a public input process,’ said Greg Locke on behalf of Concerned Citizens of King Township (CCKT).

Residents were also concerned that the report ‘loosened’ policies to make it easier for development to occur on the Oak Ridges Moraine and in the Greenbelt. What they wanted to see was more restrictive policies.

Nobleton resident Nancy Hopkinson said she did not want the lands at Highway 400 and King Road identified as employment lands. ‘The emphasis of King Township has been that development should occur in the three villages,’ stated Hopkinson. ‘To designate the lands at Highway 400 and the King Road for strategic employment is just asking for problems. We are a community of communities, not another Vaughan with its big box stores. Besides if this land is removed from the Greenbelt Plan, what land would be added?’

She suggested having the planning department write a new report after hearing input from the public on the matter.

Resident Susan Beharriell echoed Locke and Hopkinson's comments, requesting that staff hold a public meeting before submitting comments to the Region.

‘This is too important to leave entirely to professional staff alone,’ said Beharriell, adding there are some very good points in the report as well. ‘King's very survival as a rural community depends on the strength of the legislation. We need to tell the Province how important this legislation is for us. If we don't tell them who will?’

Councillors wanted to be sure that the content in the report is not taken as council's position on the Oak Ridges Moraine and Greenbelt legislation and that it be clear that there needs to be a local public consultation process and an opportunity for residents to voice their opinions and concerns.

Stephen Kitchen, director of planning for the Township of King, suggested that the report be presented as staff's comments at this time and not endorsed by council. Staff's comments could change based on what comes out of the public consultation process and input received from other agencies. He added that King has been known to be more stringent than other municipalities when it comes to the plans.

‘I would ask that you allow staff to submit these as staff comments and to allow it to go to the stakeholder meeting at the Region of York and allow it to be vetted through that sort of a process,’ said Kitchen.

Township CAO Susan Plamondon suggested adding to the resolution that the ultimate position of council with respect to the upcoming review be determined after a fulsome public engagement process.

Councillor Bill Cober pointed out that the Province has not launched the review of the plans to date and if a provincial election is called, the review of the plans may be postponed.

Mayor Steve Pellegrini said council prides itself on transparency and that is why a public consultation process is needed. He suggested staff report back to council on how to move forward with a process.

‘This is an opportunity to engage people and put together something that is a King-made solution,’ said Pellegrini, adding he supported the amendment made by Plamondon.

Since the council meeting, CCKT was invited to join the Region's workshop and the Township has arranged for two members of the Sustainability Advisory Committee to attend the workshop as well. Plamondon has also invited several residents and representatives from CCKT to meet to discuss what the Township's public consultation process should look like. Staff will report back to council in

February on the local public consultation process.