

Citizen's group hosts forum on environmental plans



The future of Ontario's protected green spaces may very well depend on the fate of three very important pieces of legislation. To that end, the Concerned Citizens of King Township (CCKT), with support of other concerned environmental groups, is hosting a presentation and round-table discussion April 9 at the Kingbridge Conference Centre and Institute in King City.

The Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan, Greenbelt Plan and Niagara Escarpment Plan are all up for review in 2015 as mandated in the respective Acts, which brought them into effect nearly 10 years ago (1985 for the NEP).

This first event of its type will educate and empower attendees to understand the success of these conservation plans to protect our land, water and quality of life, and the steps we can all take to ensure their protection and enhancement.

It brings CCKT's partners, Ontario's three predominant environmental coalition action groups, together with guest speaker Ontario Environmental Commissioner Gord Miller and an expert discussion panel.

Greg Locke, chair of CCKT will be event moderator and MC.

This event is really the first of its kind. The three coalition groups representing each plan have never been under one roof before to discuss this common theme. The Kingbridge Centre has provided us their state-of-the-art-facility - this is outstanding. And CCKT has never before been able to promote so broadly before: The London Publishing Corp.'s (King Weekly Sentinel) partnership with us to advertise our event in the majority of its community newspapers, and online, gives our event considerable reach, appropriately as the three plan areas represent a sizable portion of southern Ontario.

CCKT has made these provincial reviews job one in our mandate for the next two or more years, however long it takes to be conducted and implemented. We know these reviews will be contentious, for developers, industrialists and even some farmers would like to see these plans significantly watered down if not eliminated. King has had its fair share of threats and actual damage done to the Moraine and Greenbelt just within our borders. We are not naïve. With 70% of King lying on the Moraine and the other 30% effectively Greenbelt, we simply can't afford to be lambs in this process. We can't afford to leave a weakened legacy for our children.

We want to celebrate these plans, because for the most part they've been enormously successful in curtailing runaway urban sprawl and other forms of industrial development, threats to water and resource quality and extraction. We can thank numerous predecessors for championing these causes, some right here in King (Dorothy Izzard for one). Many Ontarians don't know these stories and the profound protections we have in place; we want to educate this history and relevance. Yet we've been criticized as being 'early in the game' to start discussing the reviews. We know this isn't the case: Regional governments have started fact-finding and recommendation-gathering processes from local municipalities, commonly conducted without any community engagement or input, not to mention council review and approval. As innocent as this seems, these initial points become firm, and it's hard to change them later. CCKT in its 40-plus-year history has seen all too often where the public is left high and dry in circumstances like this. That said, King Township is currently planning a public education and input process for the Moraine Review, and for this we're very thankful.

But in addition, it's an election year for all municipal governments in Ontario, and looking increasingly likely we'll be at the polls for a provincial election this spring. For this and other reasons, we know the time is now to bridge this gap and educate, empower

and engage our citizenry, to have their say in both maintaining and enhancing these critical pieces of our sustainable environment. Let's make these conservation plans part of the discussion with our elected officials, candidates, and government ministries.

?Regarding the Moraine Plan, CCKT will be making a formal submission to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, in fact, we already have a draft White Paper with key recommendations we'll be fine-tuning following this event based, on further input we receive.

?Gord Miller is a most learned and opinionated expert in the environmental field in Ontario, rightly so as Commissioner of Ontario's Environmental Bill of Rights. Did you know we have such a thing? It's unique and it's been successful in part to Gord's staunch defence of it. His ability to reach out in venues like this one to inform and engage, yet in a non-partisan way. Gord will set up the evening for us with his talk.?

There will be an expert discussion panel lined up to field questions from the audience.

Erin Shapero, Debbe Crandall and Bob Patrick are on-the-ground experts on these plans. Each coalition group represents a multitude of other local organizations. The OGA alone contains over 80 groups, CCKT being one of them.

David Donnelly is the fourth panelist. He's a staunch environmental lawyer and advocate with many successes under his belt, most recently representing Stewards of the Moraine in the Eliopolous wedding facility OMB challenge in King. He'll provide a very sober layer to this discussion, particularly advising attendees how to engage our institutions in these matters.

?STORM is thrilled to be a part of this evening organized by Concerned Citizens of King Township. It's amazing, 25 years ago people from across the Oak Ridges Moraine (representing CCKT, Save the Rouge, Save the Ganaraska Again, Gormley residents to name a few) gathered here in King City and formed this new group called Save the Oak Ridges Moraine Coalition. So it's quite appropriate for CCKT to be hosting a gathering of people and groups from across the Greenbelt to send a clear message that we're still in the business of protecting our land, water and rural communities. Here's to the next 25 years,? said Debbe Crandall, Save the Oak Ridges Moraine (STORM).

?The Ontario Greenbelt Alliance is pleased to partner with CCKT and other progressive groups to present an evening of discussion regarding the Greenbelt plans and upcoming 2015 review, said Erin Shapero, coordinator of the OGA.

?Ontario's Greenbelt has been working for the past nine years to protect agriculture in the province as well as protect land, air and water for all Ontarians. The Ontario Greenbelt Alliance's work focuses on protecting, strengthening and growing the Greenbelt. Sharing information and helping empower and engage communities is a key part of our work as we lead up to the 2015 review.?

?Moraines are glacial deposits and only 12,000 years old. The Niagara Escarpment has been doing the same thing for 450 million years. Moraines and the Niagara Escarpment are the collectors and the source of the water flowing toward the Great Lakes. The quantity and quality of our fresh water supply depends on the Oak Ridges Moraine and the Niagara Escarpment. We need to learn what local residents wish to see changed during this plan review process. Developers and the aggregate industry hate these three plans and are lobbying hard now to scrap them. Ontario's Places to Grow Plan has increased the pressure to develop on lands now protected to some extent by these three plans. Do we want more roads or safe drinking water? This is what it's really getting down to,? said Robert Patrick, president, Coalition on the Niagara Escarpment (CONE).

The schedule for the night includes a reception from 6-7 p.m., followed by Miller's presentation at 7:15. The expert panel Q&A discussion runs 8:30 to 9:30 p.m.

Admission is free, but CCKT would like you to register to get an idea of attendance. For more, visit cckt.ca.