

King urges province to continue EA on corridor

By Mark Pavilons

While the Province has put the brakes on studies for the GTA West Corridor, King council voted to urge them to continue with the Environmental Assessment process.

After considerable discussion at a recent council meeting, King councillors agreed to send their message to Queen's Park, with a few additions. They asking the Province to resume the EA study in order to identify and protect a preferred alignment and interchange locations with the study area identified by the EA.

King is also reiterating their preferred route south of Nobleton and agreed to send a copy of a letter from the Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust, regarding ecologically sensitive lands in the Humber River valley.

There's widespread opposition to the corridor, known as Highway 413, and some delegates at council urged councillors to simply let it go, since it appears the Province is re-evaluating its options.

Mayor Steve Pellegrini put things in perspective, noting that the EA process would effectively secure and freeze these lands, protecting them from development. This is in keeping with King's environmental position.

The mayor noted the fear is that if the Province abandons the study area, it will open up these lands to development pressure from the southern urban areas. If they move forward on development, it will continue to encroach on King's southern borders. And when the Province decides to move again on the 413, the lands would already be developed, and a new route would have to be selected. This may end up cutting a swath right through King Township.

'We're all working to do the same thing -- protect King,' Pellegrini said. 'We're asking to preserve this corridor, finish the study, and hold it!'

Councillor David Boyd added that 'as time goes on, options become more limited.'

Councillor Cleve Mortelliti said King we have to continue with the EA process and King should reinforce its previous positions on the matter. He too, doesn't want the highway cutting through King.

The staff report submitted by planning director Stephen Kitchen, said it's 'appropriate' for King to support the immediate resumption and timely completion of the EA.

Delaying the protection of lands along the 413 route 'may pressure the route north onto the environmentally sensitive lands of the Oak Ridges Moraine in King Township.' Further, GTA West Corridor would 'help alleviate the increasing passenger and truck traffic through the King Road communities of Nobleton and King City.'

'The expeditious completion of the GTA West Corridor EA is critical to ensuring the lands within the study area are protected from development to enable this vital piece of the GTA transportation network to be realized in a location outside of the Oak Ridges Moraine, and in close proximity to urban growth centres. The completion of the GTA West Corridor EA enables local and regional municipalities to undertake their transportation master plans and better plan for their future.'

Growth experts are saying that solutions require many facts, including new roads and public transit.

King resident Susan Lloyd Swail, on behalf of Environmental Defence, said many viewed the suspension of the EA by the Province as good news. The MTO 'is not asking for comments, she pointed out, urging council to simply wait to see if the process moves forward.

Moving forward with the EA is premature, she said, and she reiterated her group's opposition to the corridor. This planned toll road won't alleviate traffic, but rather will send even more vehicles on local roads. Ultimately, by the time the 400-series highway is built, it may be outdated.

Nobleton resident Nancy Hopkinson said she was thrilled when the Province announced the delay.

She hopes the 413 never comes to fruition, noting it's destructive and will bring nothing but more cars and more pollution. We have to stop turning to the same old ways by simply building highways, she said, adding we need to focus on public transit. A 400-series highway, once it's built, will only continue to expand.

A representative of the King-Vaughan Citizens Coalition, fighting the corridor, said with the suspension in the EA process, hopes are the MTO 'is reconsidering the corridor with a change in direction. The 413 would put this community in jeopardy and goes against King's penchant for environmental sustainability.

In a letter from Susan Walmer, executive director of the Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust, she pointed out they received a donation of a conservation easement on 200 acres in King south of Nobleton. These are approved as ecologically sensitive under federal criteria.

'Any changes to the current purpose and use of these properties must have the written authorization from the Federal Minister of the

Environment,??Walmer wrote. ?Generally, Environment Canada will only authorize dispositions or changes in use that do not negatively impact the ecological characteristics for which the land was originally certified. It is likely that a highway would be deemed to be a negative impact. There are also two additional properties of 200 acres with Ecological Sensitivity approval in the area.

?If we keep building highways the same way we always have, we will encourage urban sprawl and be faced with the same outcome for future generations.?Let's change the way we think and allow the implementation of a new flexible transportation system that will positively impact the Province's climate change targets.?