

Consultants bringing all documents together in revamped OP

By Mark Pavilons

King Township's new Official Plan will bring all local documents to bear in planning for the future. Everything will be brought together under 'One King.'

It's full steam ahead for King's new Official Plan and councillors and members of the public were given a glimpse into the first draft last week at a special working session.

Nick McDonald of Meridian Planning Consultants, said it's a 'hefty document' containing a lot of policy items, 'for good reason.' King, he said, has created numerous unique policies and these, combined with overlapping provincial guidelines, have resulted in a comprehensive document.

His group has helped establish consistent policies throughout King, ensuring that the new OP conforms with all provincial policies and other legislation such as the Oak Ridges Moraine Plan and Greenbelt Plan.

There's a 'very long list' of key issues affecting King.

McDonald noted the process began in 2013 and his company was retained in 2014. They drew upon the existing, and recently approved, master plans to cover all the bases.

Long-term growth, intensification and greenfield densities all gave consultants a lot to deal with.

The result, the 'One King' OP, is a 'unified document that knits it all together.'

The reason it took so long to develop was the complicated planning structure in York Region.

The intent, with the new plan, is to minimize any OP amendments in the future.

The residents will be better served by a strong policy framework in the revamped OP, all firmly rooted in King's comprehensive Sustainability Plan.

The OP even includes some climate change perspectives.

King's natural heritage system is one of the most complicated parts of the OP, given all of the legislation governing the environment.

From here, moving the OP forward is part of an aggressive schedule. Hopes are a draft plan can be presented to council in December, followed by a review period through February, 2018. A second draft is anticipated by next March, with public consultation taking place through May. It's hoped the OP will be adopted sometime next June. After that it will be sent to York Region for final approval.

Councillors were generally pleased with the first draft.

Councillor Cleve Mortelliti said he was happy to see some stronger language used in the OP regarding important issues. Mortelliti has been concerned with severances and densities in King City, which will take the brunt of development in the years to come.

McDonald said there was a lot of discussion on height of buildings and they maintained King's three-storey limit. Meridian has done OPs for other municipalities, but McDonald noted King's character is quite different.

The Township, he said, has every right to set tough limits and standards.

Policies contained in the OP are the Township's way of defending itself when its rules are challenged. Local policies are stronger when they're evenly applied across the board.

The Province demands that municipal OPs address affordable housing, and make efforts to accommodate these needs in future development.

The idea of affordability is all relative and King has one of the highest residential values in the GTA. As long as the municipality does its best to provide mixed housing types, that's all the Province can ask for.

McDonald noted every municipality in York is struggling with affordability. But this doesn't trump good planning.

The only real affordable units are condos, the mayor observed. Higher buildings tend to be the only way to offer affordable units and these need to be looked at on a site-specific basis. Mayor Steve Pellegrini said the need for this type of housing is obvious and there are ways of making it work. He pointed out the building in Schomberg is actually seven storeys tall, but given the topography, it's not invasive.

King has long had the longest approval process, and that speaks to the numerous regulations in place. The new OP is meant to

streamline things and the mayor said he wasn't want ot make the process more burdensome in the future. Councillors shared some ward-specific concerns and comments. Mayor Pellegrini noted the OP?review has been a ?long ride.? ?Let's make haste. I?want it done by (next)?June,??he said. ?It's desperately needed.? The first draft details are on the Township's website for the public's perusal.