

CCKT publishes policy paper for upcoming 2015 conservation plan reviews

King's leading citizen's group is making sure local voices are heard when it comes time to review some very important pieces of environmental legislation.

The board of Concerned Citizens of King Township (CCKT) released its anticipated policy review document to serve as its review and draft recommendations to the relevant provincial ministries engaged in the mandated 2015 review of the Oak Ridges Conservation Plan and Greenbelt Plan.

'We're delighted at this time to provide this much needed input to this anticipated critical review of these crucial plans for conserving the Oak Ridges Moraine and Greenbelt, not to mention the Niagara Escarpment Plan,' said former chair Greg Locke. 'We raised awareness of the Oak Ridges Moraine as a significant landform in the late 1980s. We continue our vigilance of the health and protection of the Oak Ridges Moraine and Greenbelt today.'

This past April, CCKT hosted and moderated a special environmental forum at the Kingbridge Centre to raise public awareness and participation for all three upcoming conservation plan reviews. CCKT partnered with Save The Oak Ridges Moraine; Ontario Greenbelt Alliance; Coalition on the Niagara Escarpment, and private sponsors including The Kingbridge Centre, London Publishing and Rogers TV to realize this vision. To a packed audience, CCKT presented Ontario Environmental Commissioner Gord Miller as guest speaker, followed by an expert discussion panel taking audience questions represented by STORM, OGA, CONE and environmental lawyer David Donnelly.

'This report contains our draft recommendations to the province, supported by this event and our own research,' said Locke. 'Why draft' recommendations?

'Because to date the relevant ministries have not provided any objective data or framework with which to conduct a thorough 'performance review' if you will, a topic well articulated by Commissioner Miller at our April forum. Without data we don't know how well the Moraine and Greenbelt plans have been performing. Until that time we're using our own best research, compiled by our retained planning consultant Susan Lloyd Swail, and additional research and opinions provided by noted conservationists.'

'The majority of King Township lies on the Oak Ridges Moraine, with the remainder virtually Greenbelt. CCKT has long been an active 'steward' of the Moraine because protecting our environment and rural way of life in King is highly dependent upon the protections afforded by these plans. And with this provincially mandated review, we have highlighted successes where we can and identified ways to make the Moraine and Greenbelt Plans even better going forward,' said CCKT interim chair Bruce Craig. 'For example, we believe the Greenbelt Plan has been largely effective at stopping sprawl, its primary purpose. Yet more can be done to make the plan work more effectively and efficiently, for example, by clarifying what 'major' and 'minor' commercial, industrial and recreational development is for all the plans ' right now there is significant vagueness that needs to be clarified.'

Municipalities including York Region have been compiling their own recommendations ahead of 2015. King Township has also committed to providing public input to its recommendations to York Region and the province.

'As these plans, with the exception of the Niagara Escarpment Plan, are administered by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, we believe we need to get front and centre with municipal planners not only in King and York Region, but across the dozens of municipalities that cross the Moraine to ensure the Plan's conservation-centric objectives are not only protected, but strengthened going forward,' Locke added. 'These are not development plans ' they are conservation plans.'

The report details a list of recommendations and their rationale. Most notably, CCKT is recommending that the Oak Ridges and Greenbelt plans be administered using a commission model, similar to the Niagara Escarpment Plan. These plans are currently administered by municipalities. CCKT believes this model has a number of significant limitations including: lack of consistent implementation across the plan boundaries, as the plans cross many municipalities; a lack of specialized municipal staff in many jurisdictions to ensure planning expertise in this area is available; a lack of authority of conservation authorities to assess and impact development proposals; and a lack of compliance monitoring of the plans by municipalities to ensure ecological integrity.

'A commission model centralizes all analysis and decision making under one organization, removed from the various political arenas all municipalities face,' Locke said. 'A commission can focus consistently on the conservationist elements of the Plans while ensuring that legitimate, permitted and beneficial development can progress.'

The report recommendations also include:

' Ban the removal or swapping of lands within the Greenbelt. At least a decade of developable lands are currently designated within our Official Plans. Yet King Township was inappropriately allotted urban centre intensification targets by York Region despite our lack of regular transit services in all villages except King City, and local water and sewer service limitations in Nobleton and Schomberg.

? Expand the range of small scale commercial uses in countryside areas including small scale cultural enterprises such as art galleries, eco-tourism uses, ?granny flats? and home industries using existing buildings, that don't require additional sewer and water services. Rural commercial uses which require additional buildings should be directed to hamlets, though CCKT fully supports allowing a second dwelling on a farm property for the use of farm managers and workers.

? Maintain the existing boundaries of settlement areas in the plan areas. The provincial document, Places to Grow, identifies land in our existing urban areas for continued growth to meet our needs beyond the next policy review in 2025. Intensification of the existing GTA urban centres with regular regional and local bus and train service should be the focus of growth rather than rural settlement areas located within the Greenbelt and Oak Ridges Moraine.

? Large scale landfill should be subject to the same scrutiny as major development on the Oak Ridges Moraine.

? Grow the Greenbelt to include natural heritage lands and prime agricultural lands at risk.

? Settlement areas near agricultural areas should be encouraged to support employment used from the agricultural industry.

? Allow relevant development approval authorities the ability to refuse a project.

? Environmental impact studies for infrastructure projects should lose points for crossing or being located within the plan areas.

? Recommendations to keep sewage and water infrastructure maintained locally where current settlements do not have Great Lake or Lake Simcoe based water and sewage services.

? Low and high intensity allowable recreational uses need further clarification in their definitions via technical guidelines.

? Consider incorporating the ORMCP water policies into the Greenbelt plan area.

? Maintain or enhance current legal and policy protections for wetlands across the Oak Ridges Moraine and Greenbelt.

? Amending the Greenbelt Plan to restrict the ?downzoning? of agricultural lands to rural lands, beyond bringing the plan into conformity with the 2005 Greenbelt Plan and the Provincial Policy Statement.

Finally the report has a few recommendations aimed specifically at King Township, namely:

? Halt King Township's request to York Region requesting that the Region of York lands at Highway 400 and King Road be changed from countryside Greenbelt lands (agricultural use) to strategic employment lands.

The need for additional employment lands has not been identified in the Region of York Official Plan to 2031.

The King Township Official Plan Review process has just commenced and a growth management study has not been undertaken to see if lands are needed for employment outside of our existing community plans. Schomberg, Nobleton and King City all have significant acreage of employment lands available.

? Agriculture should be made an employment use under the Planning Act. Within King Township, agriculture employs more people than any other industry. This exclusion of agriculture is a major impediment in our ability to plan for agriculture in our Official Plan, and as a continued employment use within the Township.

? The loss of the provincial agricultural tax credit funding for municipalities discourages municipal councils from valuing agriculture as a land use as it has a negative impact on the tax assessment base.

CCKT will be participating in the not-yet scheduled public meeting series being developed by King Township to gain local input into the plan reviews, and any upcoming public input meetings set by the province. CCKT wants to advise all interested King residents to get involved.

You can download a free copy of the 16-page CCKT report in PDF format from their website at www.cckt.ca.