

Public weighs in on updating King's official plan

By Angela Gismondi

The Township is looking to gather public input for King's new official plan.

A public open house was held Oct. 8 at the Nobleton Arena and Community Centre to obtain community input on Official Plan review principles which were developed using the input received from the public at the special meeting of council last November. Members of the public were invited to discuss the Official Plan review, go over the project work plan, learn about the process and comment and ask questions on key issues affecting the Township.

King initiated the Official Plan review process to update visions and policies which will guide the town for the next 20 years. This includes determining where intensification should be directed and identifying criteria to evaluate applications, permitting value-added activities in agricultural areas as a way to enhance farm viability, determining how new neighbourhoods should be planned and developed and identifying where and how commercial and employment growth should occur to support economic growth and competitiveness.

The Township has retained Meridian Planning Consultants to assist staff with the review. The goal is to develop a new, overarching parent Official Plan, and complete provincial plan conformity exercises to incorporate the Greenbelt Plan, the Growth Plan, the Lake Simcoe Protection Plan and Source Protection Plans into the Township's official plan documents.

The Planning Act sets out certain provincial and regional conformity requirements for municipal official plans and requires such documents to be reviewed and updated not less frequently than every five years to ensure these requirements are achieved, explained planning consultant Nick McDonald during a presentation at the public forum. King Township's Parent Official Plan was approved in 1970, and has since been amended over 80 times.

An Official Plan review is required for a number of reasons including legislative changes, provincial and regional policy direction, managing growth, promoting sustainability, providing overarching direction to existing secondary/community plans for King's hamlets and settlement areas and establishing a contemporary overarching policy context for updating Township zoning bylaws.

'The primary goal is to develop a new over-arching official plan which will replace the current official plan which is quite dated,' said McDonald. 'It will be a stand-alone document which will provide a basis for making decisions in the Township.'

The updated Official Plan must include policies that implement the Greenbelt Plan and the York Region Official Plan, focus future growth and development in existing settlement areas, protect natural and cultural heritage features within the Township and protect prime agricultural land for the long term. For each of these policy areas, the Township is required to ensure that the Official Plan policies conform to provincial plans and policies.

'A big part of this is to determine where intensification should occur,' said McDonald. 'The province tells municipalities they have to intensify to accommodate growth but they don't tell you how to do that, where it should happen and under what conditions.'

The review involves a four-phase work plan that is expected to be completed by the end of 2015, McDonald explained. To date, a background discussion paper was completed in 2014, along with a public open house. A policy directions report will be presented early next year with a public forum to follow in the spring. A draft official plan is expected in the spring of 2015. The final official plan and statutory public meeting will be held in the fall and winter of 2015.

Following the presentation, participants were asked to form groups and answer questions regarding what key issues should be taken into account in drafting the updated official plan, what key issues it should address and what elements will make it successful. Input received at the public forum will be included subsequent reports.