

Your turn in the 2015 plan review process

By Bruce Craig

Concerned Citizens of King Township

When we look around us, we know King Township is blessed with some of the most beautiful landscape in all of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). The rolling hills, large tracts of forest, wetlands, kettle lakes and many streams and rivers are part of the Oak Ridges Moraine (ORM) which covers 70% of King.

The Moraine lands and the remaining 30% of King are all within a larger region in south-central Ontario now known as the Greenbelt.

Provincial Plan with a Vision

Stretching 160 kilometres, from Rice Lake in the east to the Niagara Escarpment in the west, the ORM contains the headwaters to 60 different streams and rivers.

In 2002, with widespread public support, the Province of Ontario recognized the significance of the ORM by approving the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan (ORMCP). The vision of a ?continuous band of green, rolling hills that provides form and structure to south-central Ontario, while protecting the ecological and hydrological features and functions that support the health and well-being of the region's residents and ecosystems? was captured in this provincial plan.

The Vision Expanded

The government of Ontario added to the vision of the ORMCP when it created and approved the Greenbelt Plan in 2005 with key goals of protecting productive farmland and environmentally sensitive areas, and containing urban growth within specified areas. Other important benefits both the Moraine and adjacent Greenbelt provide to both natural heritage systems and to people and communities in the GTA include:

- ? Extensive forests provide wildlife habitat, reduce soil erosion, clean the air and moderate temperatures.
- ? Wetlands and forests absorb rain and snow replenishing drinking water aquifers, provide baseflow to streams which support aquatic ecosystems.
- ? Aquifers provide drinking water for more than 250,000 people.
- ? Protected natural heritage areas provide healthy recreational opportunities for the growing population of the GTA.
- ? Productive farmland in the Greenbelt provides fresh, nutritious foods, jobs and over \$9 billion annual economic value to the local economy.

The 2015 Co-ordinated Review

Ontario is recognized as a leader in North America for environmental planning in protecting significant landscapes, starting with the Niagara Escarpment Plan in 1985 and followed by the ORMCP in 2002 and the Greenbelt Plan in 2005.

Fast forward to 2015. In February this year the Province of Ontario announced The 2015 Coordinated Review of four significant provincial plans: The Greenbelt Plan, the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan, the Niagara Escarpment Plan and The Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe.

Now it's your turn

An important role for all of us to fill is that of stewardship for the Oak Ridges Moraine and the adjacent Greenbelt. We have an opportunity to pass on a wonderful legacy to future generations. Share your ideas on how to strengthen and improve the Plans. The Province is inviting the public to participate in a series of ?Townhall? Consultation Meetings throughout the GTA and the Greater Golden Horseshoe, and to submit written comments at one of the meetings, online or by mail by May 23.

You are strongly encouraged to attend the upcoming Townhall Consultation Meeting being held in Aurora on Monday, April 13 at ÉSC Renaissance School, 700 Bloomington Rd West. The open house runs 6 to 7 p.m. with the meeting following from 7 - 9 p.m. To check on dates and locations for other consultation meetings, please visit www.ontario.ca/landuseplanningreview.

You can also access the document, Our Region, Our Community, Our Home, which will help inform and guide discussions. Information on how to submit written comments online or by mail is also available at the provincial website.