

Planning challenges ahead

WE NEED TO LOOK no farther than next door, to the Town of Caledon, to see the importance of planning for the years ahead. There, we are witnessing a battle royal between the Town and the Region of Peel over what should happen in the Bolton area, which obviously is under great pressure from interests favouring more growth.

Until now, decisions have been based on the Town's Official Plan, which is a document that was the product of much study and has received provincial approval.

However, the Region today is supporting a single developer's application to have a large area rezoned to permit a development that Caledon councillors oppose unanimously. And provincial approval for Canadian Tire's plan to build a huge new warehousing operation has demonstrated that developments can occur in the face of strong local opposition (albeit not from the Town) when it wasn't obvious to planners that such an application would be forthcoming.

Clearly, when it comes to planning, there's a need for close co-operation among the various levels of government. And just as clearly, planning is taking place at a time when population is growing more rapidly in the Greater Toronto Area than in any other part of eastern Canada.

All of which makes it more important that we pay attention to a five-year review of Orangeville's Official Plan, as mandated under the Ontario Planning Act.

An Official Plan is a broad policy document designed to guide land use development in a community, and Orangeville's review, with costs that will be recovered through development charges rather than property taxes, will include a land needs assessment undertaken by a consultant.

Accordingly, the Town is issuing a Request for Proposals (RFP) to undertake a comprehensive review of land supply available for employment, institutional, commercial and residential uses. The review will determine whether the Town is equipped to achieve the growth targets contained within the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, a new Dufferin County Official Plan and a Development Charges Background Study with the lands currently available and the present designations of those lands. Study results will be used to determine Official Plan policy for the five-year review.

Mayor Jeremy Williams says the revised Official Plan 'will forge the Orangeville of tomorrow for generations to come,' and reasons that accordingly it is 'crucial we get that right.'

The goal will be to see whether the Town has enough lands to meet residential and employment targets set by the Provinces in its often-conflicting legislation, such as its Places to Grow and Greenbelt legislation and laws limiting development in the Oak Ridges Moraine and the Niagara Escarpment Area.

As we see it, one of the strangest situations for Orangeville is the status of the land immediately south of the town and north of Dufferin 109, the Southern Arterial Bypass.

Although the bypass would form an appropriate boundary between Dufferin and Peel, it lies entirely in Peel. And as matters stand, the land between the roadway and Orangeville's present limits is primarily agricultural, albeit with relatively little active farming. In the circumstances, there is a real possibility of the land being the site of more large gravel pits, conditions being similar to those immediately to the south, where the current proposal is for a huge pit between 109 and Melville.

Orangeville's Official Plan review is expected to be completed in April of 2016. Clearly, public input and consultation will be important to the review process, and the Town says an open house will be scheduled in early fall, with a special meeting of Council to discuss the draft Official Plan amendment expected to take place in the first quarter of 2016. Community engagement activities may also include interviews with a variety of key community stakeholder groups, surveys distributed to community members, and/or online workshops.

It will certainly be interesting to see what ideas come forward, what changes result, and whether they receive provincial approval.