

FRONT PORCH PERSPECTIVE: Double Header

By Stephen Somerville

I want to briefly touch on two different and unrelated topics today.

First, in my last column on climate change, I provided some excerpts from a great power point presentation by Bloomberg New Energy Finance, entitled, "What the COP 21 Negotiators Need to Know."

Dealing with climate change does pose serious problems to our policy makers and publicly elected officials because as they set binding emission targets some of our industries will face serious hardship while others will flourish.

Making the transition as seamless and painless as possible for our economy will be important.

The provincial premiers had all been scrambling to announce their respective plans for reducing emissions prior to going to Paris. From my perspective, I think the best long term plan might turn out to be British Columbia's approach. The province, according to its website, "introduced a revenue neutral carbon tax of \$30 per tonne of CO₂ in 2008 to encourage individuals and businesses to reduce fossil fuel use and all revenues are returned to British Columbians through personal or business tax reductions."

In Ontario the government will collect \$1.3B annually in revenue from the cap and trade scheme to start and this will of course continue to rise. And we don't know how this new found revenue will be used.

And now to Highland Gate.

As you may have read, Highland Gate Developments, after Aurora Council turned down its offer to sell the property for \$98M, has taken their case to the Ontario Municipal Board.

This situation was predictable as we have seen this occur before in a number of communities, including Glenway in Newmarket.

And the outcome is still the same.

The real estate developer introduces its plan, then they host a couple of community meetings, after which they make small non material changes to their plans. The revised plans are rebuffed by the community and their elected representatives. Then, at the first opportunity, the developer applies to the Ontario Municipal Board.

The people in the affected community are angry and want the Town to spend a considerable amount of money (usually in the hundreds of thousands of dollars on lawyers) to quash the plan.

Many other people in Town, who are not directly affected by the development, are also angry, but for a different reason; they don't want to see their elected representatives approve any money to continue the fight.

In the end, two things happen. Either the Town doesn't pay and the developer wins or the Town continues the fight, loses and the developer still wins.

In the Glenway case in Newmarket, the legal, consulting and OMB costs were about \$750,000. More if you factor in staff time and community meetings.

Council did not consider buying the land, which was the only real way to stop the development.

As I understand it, there were two different OMB issues. The town lost arguing the principals of development in the first phase.

They then negotiated without leverage in the second phase to save costs. The end result was more homes approved than were in the developers' initial proposal. There were concessions related to schools, parks and trails.

As someone who has been developing various types of power projects across Canada and the United States (natural gas, land fill gas, and wind) as well as the transmission lines and natural gas pipelines associated with these power projects, I see a parallel.

Just as the province is ultimately responsible for seeing that the lights stay on in the province, they are also responsible for ensuring that we have adequate types of dwellings to meet our population targets.

The province has now put in place regional committees to dealing with electricity planning so that a coordinated approach can be made to ensure that communities have adequate energy supply. This also means ensuring that communities understand the resulting trade-offs - including cost - between alternatives, like having local generation or large local transmission lines.

The Places To Grow Legislation that the McGuinty government put in place in 2005 ascribed intensification targets for our towns and cities.

But what I find different about this situation is that Aurora, from what I can tell, is meeting its mandated interim intensification targets and Highland Gate is a mature community.

If I am right, and the Town is meeting these targets, then they, as their locally elected officials, should have ultimate say over zoning and planning within Aurora.

I have been giving this issue considerable thought; any comments from readers would be welcome. I will have more to say about

this in future columns.

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