

Mayor calls for re-evaluation of growth targets

By Brock Weir

Mayor Geoff Dawe is calling on the Province to 'press the pause button' on Ontario's Places to Grow legislation and re-evaluate growth targets.

He made the call, along with the Mayor Rick Goldring of Burlington, at Queen's Park on Tuesday morning.

'The Places to Grow Act has served as a valuable tool to guide provincially-mandated growth,' Mayor Dawe told Provincial lawmakers. 'However, as our community approaches full build-out, demands on our municipal infrastructure and our natural and architectural heritage, are increasingly at risk. We are at a tipping point in our development, where growth will shortly exact an unacceptable cost on our environment, our services and the many qualities that make our community so attractive. The time is now for an objective appraisal of the Places to Grow Act to ensure communities across the Province are given the tools they need to determine their own destinies by managing growth sustainably and in a manner consistent with the wishes of their residents.' Speaking to The Auroran following the session at Queen's Park, the Mayor said there were many further reasons to bring this forward now. Among them, he said, was the Ministry of Transportation taking the proposed interchange at Highway 404 and St. John's Sideroad out of the budget. This, he said, is an example of the 'disconnect that goes on between various elements of the Provincial government on creating issues.'

Another issue, he added was the Upper York Sewage Solution.

'It is a critical piece of infrastructure that is needed to support the growth the Provincial government has given us,' he says. 'You do all this investment up front, the Region has spent hundreds of millions of dollars that is supposed to be paid off with development charges from this new infrastructure, that was submitted for approval four years ago and is still sitting somewhere in the Minister of the Environment's office. There is a disconnect between the various elements and the various levels of government.'

While he says Provincial ministers are always 'a little circumspect on these things,' he said he was encouraged by the reaction he and his fellow municipal lawmakers received in the Legislature.

'I think there is a willingness to listen,' he says. 'At AMO (Association of Municipalities of Ontario) this year, one of the events that goes on is referred to lovingly as 'The Bear Pit' where all ministers come in and you throw questions at them. Usually, quite frankly, it is not the most beneficial use of your time, although it is sometimes fun, but I got a distinct impression this year that, first of all, they were actually there to listen. They were actually there to see what changes needed to be made, and I was quite impressed with how quickly most of the ministers had gotten up to speed on their portfolios. They have got the energy and the motivation to move on things, to change some of the elements.'