

POLITICS AS USUAL: Coordinated Review?

By Alison Collins-Mrakas

This week at Regional Council, the members will be considering a report from staff concerning the 2015 Co-ordinated Provincial Review of the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, the Greenbelt Plan and Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan.

It's an interesting read both for what it does say, and for what it doesn't.

If you have the time I encourage you to read it, or at attend the Regional Council meeting on May 21. Staff will be presenting their report at the meeting.

By way of background, a number of fairly significant pieces of environmental legislation, most notably the Greenbelt Plan and the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan (ORMCP), are due for a review this year.

To save time and effort, the various plans are being reviewed together though it is unclear to me at least whether consideration is given during the review process to where/how/if these plans overlap, conflict or fail certainly as it speaks to the context of municipal planning. We shall see once it is complete.

The Province has hosted consultative exercises in municipalities over the past 18 months or so in preparation for this review and to elicit feedback from key stakeholders. Aurora MPP Chris Ballard hosted just such a workshop/consultation a month or so ago.

Input was sought from environmental groups, builders, local politicians and interested residents alike.

Formal responses are being put forward by the various regional governments later this month. What is interesting is that Regional governments were permitted a mere 90 days to offer comment during Phase 1 of the consultations.

That is not a lot of time when it comes to municipal matters certainly not when it requires multiple departments conducting multiple assessments, all of which must be put in a report form for a review by Council. The last day for comment during this Phase is May 28, or just a week after the Regional Council Meeting at which the report is to be reviewed.

The Region quite rightly points out that the compressed commentary time period is insufficient.

The Provincial Plans have significant implications for Regional and local land use planning; the Region requires sufficient time to undertake a comprehensive review and analysis of any proposed amendments. Given the relatively short Phase 1 time frame, the Region is asking the Province to allow at least six months to respond to draft amendments when published in Phase 2?

My question is, why the rush? Does the Province want to do it quickly? Or do they want to do it correctly? Do they want meaningful consultation? Or do they want to merely check off the box that says, "Consult with municipalities" and that's it?

There is a sense of urgency throughout the Region's report. These Plans and the legislation that underpins them are of vital importance to how our municipality will evolve. The Region is expected to grow exponentially over the next 20-30 years. There will be constant pressure to waive aside the environmental, the agricultural, the social capital protections the Plans currently afford.

It is in our best interest to pay attention now, or we will pay for it later.

Until next week, stay informed, stay involved because this is after all Our Town.