

Tempers flare at debate over Ontario Municipal Board



By Brock Weir

He was sitting quietly in the Newmarket Theatre audience for most of last week's debate, but when candidates took aim at the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB), outgoing MPP Frank Klees was all ears.

With Newmarket still smarting from the OMB paving the way for the redevelopment of the former Glenway golf course into a residential development, each candidate's stance on ensuring municipalities would have a say in local development was foremost in the minds of many.

When asked whether each candidate would ?meaningful reform? of the OMB to give priority to local planning decisions, each candidate said they believed reforms, in some way, were in the offing.

For Green Party candidate Andrew Roblin, municipalities like Aurora and Newmarket need to have more authority over decision-making taking place on their own land. Libertarian Jason Jenkins was straightforward in his reply that he did not support ?another layer of bureaucracy in government? ? and the OMB was a prime example.

NDP candidate Angus Duff, on the other hand, said he hears residents say ?development has gotten out of control?. There needs to be a ?consultative process? so decisions are ?aligned with what is good for the community.?

Strong words were saved between Liberal candidate Chris Ballard and Progressive Conservative candidate Jane Twinney. As an Aurora councillor, Ballard said there are often OMB questions that come up at the table where, if developers don't get what they want, Council is told they will be taken to the OMB which is ?a very real and expensive threat.?

Ballard said he was ?delighted? to see the Liberals say the OMB ?must be responsive to the Community, listen to the community? and a review was a step in the right direction.

For Twinney, however, the problem wasn't with the OMB itself but rather the legislation governing it. That is what needs to change, she said, and until legislation is changed nothing will follow.

A true step in the right direction was the Protecting Existing Communities bill brought forward in the last session by Klees, which did not make it through the legislature, she said.

?That bill went nowhere,? said Ballard after Twinney pointed out he was one of just two Aurora councillors who voted against endorsing the Klees bill last spring, asking how he can represent the people if he ?didn't support them when they needed him the most.?

?We have researched this,? continued Ballard. ?The bill Mr. Klees introduced went nowhere and it went nowhere because Mr. Klees didn't want it to go anywhere. It was not moved through.?

During the public question session, however, Klees came to the microphone to defend himself. As MPP, he said he took the Glenway issue very seriously and, if passed, his bill would have given Newmarket the final authority in that decision.

?Tonight you attacked my integrity by saying I did not want that Legislation passed,? said Klees. ?That is a lie and an attack on me personally. Seeing as you personally attacked my integrity publically, will you withdraw your statement publicly and will you offer a public explanation for your statement??

Ballard declined to apologise, saying he was ?provided information? on scheduling requests at Queen's Park and there were no requests to move the bill ahead.

?I can only draw the conclusion that if there is no request to move it ahead, there is no request to move it ahead,? said Ballard.