

The cost of land protection tackled at NDACT meeting

The cost of land protection tackled at NDACT meeting

By Marni Walsh

Shirley Boxem, Chair of the North Dufferin Agricultural and Community Taskforce (NDACT) opened their Annual General Meeting on July 28 to a crowded hall in the Horning's Mills Community Centre.

Ms. Boxem noted that the crowd was filled with 'friends and supporters' and thanked them for being there. She introduced board members and once the minutes and agenda were adopted and financial statement reviewed the meeting adjourned to focus on the Coordinated Land Use Planning Review Draft.

This review only occurs every ten years, and Ms. Boxem stressed, 'As we go through policy changes, public opinion does matter.'

She encouraged continued submissions from the community, announcing that 50 per cent of the responses to the review of the Aggregate Resources Act mentioned protection of farm land and water with specific reference to NDACT's legacy movement 'Food and Water First.'

Keynote speaker Victor Doyle, Manager of the Coordinated Review at the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing for the Province, addressed the Draft and what changes it holds for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, including expansion of protected lands and water under the Green Belt and the Niagara Escarpment.

In terms of climate change, Mr. Doyle underscored, 'What we do locally affects us globally.'

'Food and Water First has sent a resounding message across the province,' he added, noting the community should be very proud.

Mr. Doyle also praised the provincial government, saying they had taken 'aggressive' steps to protect farmland and water in the Green Belt.

'Canada is a young country,' he said, and already it 'has paved over one-third of our farmland. We have to think hundreds of years into the future'we must ask where urban sprawl stops.'

He advised residents that to control urban expansion they must identify important water function areas when addressing the government.

Prior to the AGM, Ms. Boxem said, with insight from Mr. Doyle, 'we expect to be able to responsibly guide our supporters on submitting comments' to the government.

This is a final opportunity to voice our concerns and to speak with a consistent message on protecting our food and water for future generations.'

However, the evening was not without concern regarding the proposed legislation. In response to a question from the audience, Mr. Doyle confirmed that the legislation did not address or change anything about aggregate applications 'that remained 'status quo.'

Mulmur Councillor Janet Horner, the Dufferin representative on the Niagara Escarpment Commission and the Executive Director of the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance, expressed financial repercussions for Dufferin County should the legislation pass as proposed.

?Conservation land tax rebates? to tax payers living in the Niagara Escarpment protection areas already add up to a loss of over \$250,000 to Mulmur Township each year, she said.

Councillor Horner warned that the new expanded area proposed for the NEC would mean that loss could grow to \$800,000 a year and make it very difficult for the Township to fund necessary services for Mulmur residents.

Consequently, this could mean a tax hike for rate payers of \$1,000 more per year per household to makeup the short fall.

There will be some consequences for areas of Melancthon as well and the County will take a big financial hit in rebates (possibly \$1,000,000) should the expansion go through.

Mulmur Township already provides high protection for the escarpment and questions the benefits of the expansion to the citizens, added Councillor Horner. She said the lower tier municipalities need to ?take a close look at this and make sure that compensation is provided.?

Former NDACT Chair Carl Cosack introduced Tom Eisenhauer, President of Bonnefield Farm Investments.

The investment firm, one of the largest land owners in Canada with over 80,000 acres across the country ? all 100% funded by Canadian investments in Canadian farmers ? took ownership of Highland Company lands in 2013.

Bonnefield leases farms to farmers.

Mr. Eisenhauer says the company has been working to repair and restore many of the homes destroyed by the Highland Company in the Boston-based hedge fund's bid to turn the first class farmland into one of the world's largest open pit mines ? an act of good faith, says Bonnefield, to bring community back to the Honeywood area.

In the eyes of most locals, Bonnefield is an improvement from the imminent threat to farmland and source water from the Highland Companies.

However, the question remains whether returning to what is somewhat, ?uncomfortably? reminiscent of the land baron system that many of our ancestors escaped from when they immigrated to this country over a century ago truly benefits Canadian farmers or food production.

In the end, Ms. Boxem thanked the board members and technical support team for their work and dedication.

?I believe we are in the homestretch and the mandate of NDACT will be fulfilled in the foreseeable future,? she said.

Public submissions on the Coordinated Land Use Planning Review Draft are due no later than September 30. Visit www.nadact.com for information.

The North Dufferin Agricultural and Community Taskforce is seeking three new members for the Board of Directors ? if interested contact Info@NDACT.com.