

Greenbelt discussion for residents and candidates says NDACT

Written By Marni Walsh

The North Dufferin Community Task Force will hold a brief AGM on Wednesday, May 2nd at 7 pm followed by discussions with speaker Victor Doyle, the chief architect of farmland-protection in the Greenbelt Expansion Plan. He will be joined by Melancthon Mayor Darren to speak on 'the intersect' between Municipal development and the Greenbelt. NDACT invites area provincial candidates and residents to participate in this important local discussion.

As a former Manager for the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH) Planning Policy Branch, Victor Doyle is well positioned to answer questions and prompt dialogue on the issues facing townships like Melancthon. Mr. Doyle will rebut developer's claims that the Growth Plan and Greenbelt Plan have constrained the supply of land or the supply of ground related housing.

When asked about municipalities leaning towards pro development, Melancthon Mayor Darren White said, 'I don't believe we are in Melancthon. We have extremely limited potential for industrial or commercial development through our own OP and I think that's important to us. Our villages already have established boundaries and available lots for building and infilling and we believe that we can meet our growth plan targets with those alone. There is very limited ability in Melancthon to rezone farmland for other uses and that's the way we like it.'

'As for others,' Mr. White says, 'I understand how the continual pressure to expand services that comes from both sides, the residents and the upper levels of government, can force municipalities to look for development potential. With increased cost comes the requirement for increased revenues.'

The Chair of NDACT Alia Jalbert Smyth told the Free Press that NDACT made delegations to North Dufferin Municipal Councils and to Dufferin County Council recently, proposing that the initiative to study expanding the Greenbelt include a variety of source water and watershed areas. 'During those delegations, most municipalities expressed the concern that this expansion would adversely affect their official plans for development and/or would adversely affect their tax base,' said Ms. Jalbert Smyth.

'Knowing that the government will be encouraging significant population growth in the Golden Horseshoe, it is plain that Dufferin County is one of the few large, relatively empty green spaces still within easy reach of the GTA, and therefore is potentially at risk of being engulfed by a uncoordinated approach to development and/or land and water protection,' said Ms. Jalbert Smyth. 'The NDACT board feels that most Dufferin County residents value the pace of life here, are connected to an agricultural lifestyle, and recognize the importance of protecting water and land that can sustain proposed population growth without having to rely entirely on increasingly fragile (drought, fires, etc.) foreign produce imports.'

NDACT knows 'that in the short term, development increases the municipalities' tax base and representation which provides obvious benefits.' But, 'the line that is not as clear is those extra residents and businesses also require improved infrastructure, and may have longer commutes so need better and more responsive public works support -those services will all eventually incur maintenance costs' for the municipalities.

'With the provincial election on the horizon,' Ms. Jalbert Smyth says, 'NDACT thought the topic important enough to provide information to local residents so they could continue to inform themselves on the subject. Both speakers' backgrounds uniquely allow them to address the challenges facing townships in North Dufferin.'

Mr. Doyle does not believe growth and the Greenbelt have to be in conflict - that there is more than enough space. NDACT would encourage the province to invest in the types of infrastructure, such as fibre-optic cabling, necessary for many large businesses; that will encourage development into other parts of the province and reduce the concentration of people in Ontario's best agricultural areas.

Dufferin County residents and candidates are encouraged to join in the discussion on Wednesday, May 2nd at 7 p.m. in the Horning's Mills Community Hall.