

OP committee mulls options to suit all

The Dufferin County Official Plan steering committee appears to be aiming at satisfying the provincial dictum without wresting local planning decisions away from the lower tier.

In general terms, this might amount to the county replacing the province as the approving authority for lower tier official plan amendments, subdivision approvals and other such things.

So far, such a concept might sit well with the lower tier. For one, Amaranth Deputy Mayor Walter Kolodziechuk said in effect that approval at the county level would be preferable.

Yet, two of the county's towns ? Mono and Orangeville ? are unlikely to be enamoured. Now, those two are exempt from provincial intervention in their official plans, possibly because they have established planning departments.

The steering committee would prefer to continue those exemptions but it has yet to be learned whether the ministry of municipal affairs and housing would react positively to a request to give the county authority within the official plan to grant exemptions.

In that vein, MMM consultant Chris Tyrell told the committee Tuesday that Owen Sound is the only municipality in Ontario that is exempt from upper tier approval of official plan issues. He explained that the Georgian Bay city had been a city within Grey County (as Guelph is within Wellington) and had retained its independence upon joining the lower tier.

Dufferin CAO Sonya Pritchard warned that the committee can't simply go to the ministry and say it wants something. ?It has to justify (what it is asking for).? She reiterated in several contexts, including the provincial demands for intensification.

According to the province now, Dufferin should aim for 40% intensification. Not practical, suggested East Garafraxa Mayor Allen Taylor. ?People don't move to the county to live in a high rise or on a 30-foot lot.?

Would the county's official plan interfere with some lower tier aspirations?

There are three sides to that equation, if that's possible. The first, with respect to land use, would be related to the local official plan; the second would be whether the municipality has the service capacity to satisfy the needs of the aspiration; and the third would be whether there could be a population allocation.

Mayor Taylor said a developer had proposed a subdivision at Marsville that would rival Shelburne in size. The council had rejected the plan but it could come back in 2015 and possibly win approval from a new council.

In such a case, to the mayor's disenchantment, the official plan for the settlement area should be amended before the county plan takes effect in August 2014. The ministry doesn't rubber-stamp official plans or amendments overnight.

But a major expansion of Marsville would require confirmation of servicing ability. Ms. Pritchard pointed out that Grand Valley and Shelburne have prepared themselves for population allocations. Would it be fair to remove those.

Grand Valley Mayor John Oosterhof warned that he had started laying the groundwork for expansion in 2000, and ?we're just putting it in place now.?

In other areas, the weighted vote at the county has been a common concern, according to the consultant.

But the official plan can't speak to that issue, he said, although other upper tiers with weighted votes have found ways to cope. He didn't elaborate, but Ms. Pritchard there is a way within the legislation to deal with it. (The weighted vote formula is part of the Dufferin County Act.)

Mr. Tyrell indicated there will be a draft of the committee's report in about February, followed by a draft of the official plan in March.

Before then, there will be open houses in Shelburne and Orangeville, on Jan. 7 and 15 respectively. Mayor Taylor would like to have an additional one on Jan. 18.

But Deputy Mayor Ken McGhee said he wants all lower tier councillors to have all the answers prior to the open houses.

Ms. Pritchard said the committee will discuss how this can be accomplished. She didn't point out that the committee meetings are open for attendance by interested councillors.

By Wes Keller