

Public gets to comment on county OP

Orangeville and Mono would likely lose their exemptions from higher level scrutiny of official plan amendments (OPA) but all of Dufferin's six municipalities would have autonomy in site plan approvals under a county Official Plan.

Consultant Chris Tyrell of the MMM Group said Owen Sound (population about 22,000) is the only lower tier municipality in Ontario that is exempt under a county OP (Grey) and that is only because it had been a separated city within the county prior to the county OP.

Mr. Tyrell told approximately 30 at the public meeting on Dufferin's OP at Shelburne Saturday that the province has not been receptive to granting Orangeville and Mono similar accommodation ?but we can talk to them again.?

The public meeting at Shelburne Saturday followed a Thursday evening presentation of the OP's initial graphic draft to all 53 local municipal councillors. A further meeting for public input was set for Wednesday evening, Jan. 15, at 7 p.m. in the atrium at 55 Zina St., Orangeville.

Last Thursday's councillor responses have been posted on the county's website. It's expected there'll be postings of the two current public meetings.

Further to Mr. Tyrell's presentation, County CAO Sonya Pritchard explained at an administrative workshop ? one of three within the public meeting ? that the county would not be given authority to grant exemptions but would be able to delegate some responsibilities. She said she is confident it would delegate authority for site plan approvals to the lower tier.

This might have evoked the most enthusiastic response of the day, in Mulmur Councillor's three words, ?that is good news.? But, he continued, ?what if it doesn't??

There remains an evident undertone of misgiving among municipal politicians about the county council's weighted voting system as it might apply to issues respecting the Plan, as Orangeville representatives share 12 of 29 votes and would need only the support of either Shelburne or Mono to control the outcome of a vote.

Still, the county's Official Plan role in the arguable final analysis would simply be to replace the province as the overseer, and not to assume the role of planner although growth management would be governed to some extent by the OP.

Feelings appear to diverge somewhat amongst municipal leaders. In conversations last Saturday, Grand Valley Mayor John Oosterhof, without reference to voting, said he would rather deal with the county than the province ?as the county understands where you're coming from,? but Mulmur Mayor Paul Mills, without reference to an overseer preference, was adamant that voting on the OP should be ?one person one vote.?

Mayor Oosterhof viewed the local OP as a simple case of the province downloading a further responsibility on the county. He doubted there would be a corresponding reduction of staff at the province. ?They'll be drafting more red tape,? he quipped.

Apart from administration details, the county is estimated to grow to a population of 80,000 by 2031, 81,000 by 2036, and then to 85,000 by 2041.

The present population, by local count, is 59,000; an increase from 56,881 in the 2011 census. That would mean moving the equivalent of the present population of Orangeville (about 29,000) into the county in the next 21?22 years while preserving agricultural land.

The OP appears drafted to meet the county's current Growth Management Plan by which the majority of new population would follow the centres of population that have ?assimilative capacity.?

The three main centres and their ultimate capacity/allocated population are: Orangeville, 36,490; Shelburne, 10,000; and urban area of Grand Valley, 6,050 plus 1,600 in the rural area. Mono, a ?rural town,? would grow to 9,890 in 2036.

The OP envisions growth among the townships resulting in these 2036 numbers: Amaranth, 4,710; East Garafraxa, 3,180; Melancthon, 3,430; and Mulmur, 4,340.

There would be an unallocated 1,310 population in 2036. Its allocation would be to the municipalities capable of providing whatever service is required.

There will be a presentation to county council in February, followed by a formal draft of the plan in March. That will be taken to the local councils in April and May, followed by public open houses in late May and then again to the council.

There will be a statutory public meeting followed by county council's adoption of the plan in August.

And then the province gets into the act.

By Wes Keller