

County OP needs more time for study and public input

Project Leader for the first County of Dufferin Official Plan, Tracey Atkinson says preparations continue to move forward on schedule and budget for completion August 21st. But, Mayor Ed Crewson, who agrees there is a need for co-ordination at an upper level "to prevent inter-jurisdictional conflicts," says, "More time would permit more study," and that "more cooperation from the province would produce a more acceptable official plan." The North Dufferin Agricultural and Community Taskforce (NDACT), one of 20 members on the Stakeholders' Committee attending meetings for the Official plan, says the more residents get involved at this stage of the process, the "more impact can be effected on the result." They suggest the public put the question to Councillors: "Do they believe that this Draft OP gives them the needed tools to manage land use policy within Dufferin County?"

Mayor Crewson feels, "The problems that are being encountered are that the Province is setting the rules and the time-line for this first County of Dufferin Official Plan." (The Province passed a regulation that stipulates that a County Official Plan must be in place by Mar. 1, 2015; the County is hoping to complete the Plan before the fall elections and any possible change of councillors.) Dufferin County Council may not even agree on an Official Plan because Orangeville and Mono do not want to accept a plan that does not give them control over their own Official Plans, and East Garafraxa does not want the County to have control over aggregate development, which Amaranth opposes. Mayor Crewson says "from Shelburne's perspective the draft plan is okay, but it lacks a clear statement of governing process." The question remains, if the plan is adopted, "will there be a standing committee set up to make recommendations to County Council on planning or will there be a separate planning board set up with members appointed by council?"

County Warden Bill Hill says, "There has been resistance from all lower tier Municipalities as well as County Council. There has not been any benefit shown for the residents of Dufferin County resulting from this plan being forced on us. The general consensus is this is another effort to download costs to the local Municipality."

The Warden commented on frustration with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing for not allowing certain concessions, "Frankly it would not surprise me that unless they change their position the plan will not be adopted; that will effectively take it off the table for six months and will mean that staff, the consultants, CAO's of the lower tiers as well as County, County Council and the Councils of the lower tiers will have spent a lot of time and energy and close to two hundred thousand dollars without achieving anything. That would be a shame."

Brian Bell has been involved in numerous OP stakeholders' meetings over the last year on behalf of NDACT and Food and Water First. It has been his observation that suggestions expressed by the various stakeholders have been included in "some form or other" in the drafts of the O.P. "It is stated numerous times that Dufferin County views its prime farmland and source water as important to the County," says Bell, "however Council has not been given the tools to protect and preserve its prime farmland in any meaningful way, even though it is a stated goal within the Draft O.P."

Official Plans are governed by the Provincial Policy Statement, and the Aggregate Resources Act takes precedence over preserving Class 1 farmland. Bell says, "We do not understand why the Draft O.P. for Dufferin County would not try to be more proactive in defending the County's interests and ability to control its own land-use policies. Dufferin County councillors do not make provincial legislation, but they do make decisions about land-use policy within Dufferin County and they need to make sure their Draft Official Plan includes the tools to give them that control. As it currently stands, it is our view that it does not."

NDACT encourages residents to contact their local councillor and express their desire to see more proactive language in the draft document that places the control over decisions about land use, particularly agricultural lands, in the Councils of Dufferin County. All residents are encouraged to attend the Statutory Public Meeting to be held on Wednesday, August 13th to "make their wishes known." Bell adds, "Tracey Atkinson and her team have proven to be good listeners and no comments will be discounted." The Province provided the County with their comments on the Draft Official Plan on Monday, July 7th and comments were reviewed with local councillors at a Joint-Council Workshop.

The Statutory Public Meeting will be held on Wednesday, August 13, 2014 at the County of Dufferin Council Chambers, 51 Zina

Street (2nd Floor), Orangeville, at 7 p.m. The notice will be circulated no later than the 24th of July and a revised version of the Official Plan will be available on-line and at the County office by the 24th of July. Planners will continue to receive public comments up until the adoption of the plan scheduled for August 21st.

Questions and comments may be directed to Tracey Atkinson, Project Manager Dufferin County Official Plan Phone: 519 941-2816 ext. 2508 or by e-mail at tatkinson@dufferincounty.ca

By Marni Walsh