

Editorial ? OMB review could be a benefit

There is cause for optimism from the Province's recent announcement that there is to be a review of the scope and effectiveness of the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB).

There is no doubt that there has to be an appeal mechanism when it comes to land-use planning measures. But it is also necessary to make sure it's performing the function it's in place to perform.

There have been many horror stories over the years regarding the OMB. It's been painted as a forum for fair hearings of issues, free of political influence. But there have also been concerns that the Board is the salvation of people with pockets deep enough to afford the best experts. That is not the way things were meant to be.

When it comes to the situation in Caledon, we thought Mayor Allan Thompson put it quite well: ?Caledon planning should be in Caledon.?

We believe, therefore, that the rules that have been put into place locally should have a certain amount of priority. They have, after all, been put in place by people close to the ground, and most familiar with local conditions and, yes, desires. And there should also be consideration that these policies, put in place locally, have also been reviewed and approved by higher levels. That should certainly count for something.

It is too often when major proposals are presented which spark considerable controversy. In many cases, those watching just give a shrug, voicing the opinion that the OMB is eventually going to decide it.

In announcing the review, the government stated that since 2004, it has made a series of land use planning reforms that, among other things, give municipalities a stronger voice and more independence in local land use decisions.

As we stated above, that's the way it should be.

But there must always be a way from people to be able to appeal decisions. That is basic in a democracy. We hope that will be remembered as a priority during the review. And it would be nice to see protection from people who use their right of appeal to just be nuisances.

We are all familiar with the famous quote from Margaret Mead: ?Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, concerned citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.?

There is much good that can occur when thoughtful people put their minds to something. But what we all have to worry about is the harm that can be caused by a small group of thoughtless people. Alas, they are not too hard to find.

The review must make sure the OMB remains a body that can hear legitimate concerns, while filtering out the frivolous.