

Few changes appear to be coming from the ongoing Bolton SPA review

By Bill Rea

The special policy area (SPA) in Bolton has been protecting local development from flooding for some 30 years.

It's time for it to be reviewed, but it looks like very little in the way of change is going to be needed.

That point was made recently as the Town of Caledon hosted a public meeting on the pending reviews.

Chris Tyrrell, of MMM Group, project manager of the consulting team working on the review, told the meeting the aim of the SPA is to protect development in areas prone to flooding. The Bolton valley is an existing community that is subject to flooding. The SPA permits development where there are possible risks, as long as it is monitored, through such methods as flood-proofing buildings, etc. He added the SPA sets out common rules for development that have been agreed to by the Town, Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA), Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF) and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH).

The purpose of the current study is to review and update the SPA, making sure the rules in place are still appropriate and being properly managed. As well, he said dealing with the risk of floods has to be balanced with the needs of the community to keep it vibrant. Tyrrell also said technical data has been updated over 30 years.

‘Lots has changed over the last 30 years,’ he commented, adding the Province has new guidelines for SPAs.

Tyrrell explained the study process started in 2013, with base line conditions being assessed.

The study is currently in the second of three phases. It will result in a planning justification report, which will assist the Town in updating its emergency management plans.

The third phase will see the processes for an amendment to Caledon's Official plan, as well as a rezoning to revise the SPA. Tyrrell said that will require a formal public information meeting, as well as approval from TRCA and the Province.

The plan is to have all the work done by August, although the timing will be subject to Provincial approvals.

Tyrrell said a flood risk assessment report was issued last May, and there was a public open house to discuss it. An analysis of that report, based on data from TRCA, indicate the floodlines in the SPA have moved a bit over the 30 years. He said it's a ‘very modest adjustment,’ based on better modelling and mapping that's available today.

He also said that getting into and out of buildings safely, in the event of a severe flood like what happened in 1954 with Hurricane Hazel, is a key factor in assessing the risks.

TRCA updates its modelling in 2013 to simulate what happened during Hurricane Hazel, and that's where the revised floodlines have come from.

When the original floodplain was mapped out, he said it was based on certain land issues that were in place in 1954. The new modelling takes into account changes that have occurred since then.

Tyrrell said the planning justification report will be addressing a number of issues, including future land uses, assessing flood risk for alternative development scenarios, coming up with recommendations for potential modifications to SPA policies and boundaries, assessing heritage properties and how they can be protected, and creating a framework for the development of an emergency response plan specific to the flooding situation in Bolton.

Flood risk assessment has been based on different scenarios, including anticipated build-out or intensification. The Town's intensification studies have identified potential opportunities within the SPA. Tyrrell said the expectation is there won't be significant development expansion in the SPA beyond what's already permitted.

He also said in terms of flood risk, there's not much change in the moderate risk levels between existing conditions and anticipated build-out, but there would be an increase in the number of buildings at high risk.

When it comes to the emergency response plan framework, Tyrrell said it will address nine main topics: Flood warning system, responsibilities, evacuation discussion plan, warning plan, evacuation plan, flood mitigation plan, shelter plan, signage, and plan maintenance and education.

According to the preliminary findings, Tyrrell said the mapping will be updated on the existing SPA, with possibly more remedial measures, like berming, being considered. He added that will be addressed in future studies conducted by TRCA.

The drafts of the Official Plan amendment and rezoning will include removing entitlements for non-permitted uses in the SPA, like institutions; balancing the flood risks with existing zoning entitlements; and updating floodproofing requirements.

Tyrrell assured several people at the meeting that nothing major is likely from the review for individual property owners.