

Greenbelt council offers plenty of recommendations to Province

Written By MARK PAVILONS

From preserving conservation authorities to addressing employment opportunities, the Greenbelt Council released their 12th progress report, serving up some important recommendations for Queen's Park.

Committee Chair David Crombie submitted his report to the Honourable Steve Clark, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Crombie stressed his group supports the diverse and important roles played by Conservation Authorities, recognizing their importance in enabling watershed management and monitoring, and their provision of expertise to communities across the Greater Golden Horseshoe. He asked Minister Clark for an update on the status of the regulation and the government's directions in respect of this council's advice.

The current economic turmoil makes some predictions difficult, especially those centering around population and employment.

There's a very real potential to significantly change future employment and travel patterns and associated locational choice for existing and future GGH residents.

Given this level of uncertainty, now seems like an inopportune time to be considering an extension to the planning horizon to 2051, especially when the proposed new forecasts are to be considered minimums that can be exceeded by municipalities. Council recommends the Province reconsider making such a significant change in the absence of evidence-based research and a clearer focus on the many changes to our society that may come in a post-COVID future, the report said.

The forecasts underestimated population growth in the Toronto and Peel, and overestimated growth elsewhere. Estimated population growth from 2011 to 2019 in both Toronto and Peel exceeded forecasted growth by 13 per cent (as compared to the 1 per cent and 2 per cent exceedances in total population reported by Hemson). By 2019, Toronto and Peel together were estimated to have attracted over 60,000 more new residents than anticipated by the 2012 Growth Plan forecasts.

The council is opposed to extending municipal official plan planning horizons to 2051.

Of particular interest to Caledon is the use of Ministerial Zoning Orders.

Province overrules Peel Region in approving Mayfield West development

The Province stepped in and overturned a Peel Region decision by giving developers the green light to move forward with plans to construct empty land in Mayfield West.

A ministerial zoning order (MZO) was issued for the development of the Mayfield West area July 10. The MZO was requested by members of Caledon council.

The development plans will bring much employment to the local area, says Caledon Mayor Allan Thompson, and will see residential and commercial amenities boosted in the area. The Town took the step to request the MZO after watching the proposed development of Mayfield West stall in recent years. Constructing the area, it is believed, will provide a big boost to the Caledon community.

All members of Caledon Council approved the decision to lobby the provincial government, except one.

Ward 5 (Bolton) Regional Councillor Annette Groves displayed her anger with the Province, Region and fellow Caledon council members for allowing this development to move forward.

?Doug Ford and his government granted yet another Ministerial Zoning Order to a group of developers in Caledon. These are the same group of developers that received a number of these Ministerial Zoning Orders in Vaughan,? read her Facebook post. ?Caledon Council claims that Caledon should plan Caledon, which is such hypocrisy, because the way I see it, is that a certain group of developers and the Province of Ontario is planning Caledon.?

The residential development is said to provide accommodation for up to 7,600 people and bring 550 new jobs to the community, stated Mayor Allan Thompson in his blog.

?Getting shovels in the ground will help stimulate our economy during these unprecedented times,? he stated.

The Greenbelt Council recommends the Province should:

? Use Ministerial Zoning Orders (MZO) sparingly and only in exceptional cases.

? Prohibit swapping Greenbelt lands for non Greenbelt lands as part of an MZO.

? Ensure that information about an MZO is publicly accessible and explicit. It should include a detailed and specific rationale, and provide details of the development, the site size and location. and this information should be highlighted on the ministry's website and the Environmental Registry.

? Ensure that the public is formally consulted prior to the issuance of an MZO.

? Prohibit the use of an MZO where development proposal is currently before the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal (including the pre?hearing stage).

Council has heard stakeholders' concerns about the current use of MZOs under the Planning Act. The expectation is that they be used sparingly and only in exceptional cases, since their use limits the Planning Act's well-established and highly regarded land use planning process.

Unlike the act's usual planning process, the MZO process lacks clear rules for public participation and transparent municipal decision-making, the council noted.

?There is concern that there may be a growing understanding/expectation by individual developers and municipalities that MZOs are becoming a regular planning process, which is not the intent in the Planning Act.?

Where an MZO may be deemed necessary, greater transparency would be achieved by providing a detailed and specific rationale, including an explanation of the urgency, size and nature of the proposal and map of the location with its issuance. It would be helpful if all MZOs with the above information were listed on the ministry website and Environmental Registry.

In addition, MZOs should not be considered for speculative proposals by individual developers as a means of skipping the standard planning process and allowing a proposal to move directly to site plan control and building permit stages.

The council notes that the recent Bill 197 enhances the Minister's MZO authorities to include site plan approval in ?specified areas,? but stipulates that these specified areas cannot include Greenbelt.

?While MZOs are permitted under the Planning Act at the Minister's discretion, it is important that an MZO proposal is urgent and essential, that the process of MZO approval is subject to public consultation, and that it is fair and transparent. MZOs are being increasingly used, if this reflects a systemic issue with the planning process council suggests the Province would be better served if it addressed the issue directly.?