

Positive things are hoped for from OMB review

By Bill Rea

Ontario is undertaking a review of the scope and effectiveness of the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB).

And local observers are hoping that will bring positive results.

"I welcome it," Mayor Allan Thompson commented. "I'm glad to see the review happening."

There are also questions about what shape the review will take.

"They didn't announce a lot of details," Dufferin-Caledon MPP Sylvia Jones observed.

The OMB is an independent public body where people can appeal land use decisions that affect their properties and communities. It is seen as an important part of the province's land use planning system.

There is still a continuing need for the OMB in Ontario's land use planning system, according to a statement released by the government. That is why they are exploring changes to make sure that the Board's role is appropriate, open and fair.

Through the review, the government will consider the Board's scope (what it deals with) and effectiveness (how it operates) to determine improvements with respect to how it works within Ontario's broader land use planning system.

Thompson said he's hoping the review will result in more planning authority at the local level. He pointed out things like Official Plan amendments occur after community engagement.

"Caledon planning should be in Caledon," he said. "I think an OMB review is a good way to make sure we get that done."

The government announced there have been a series of land use planning reforms since 2004 that set out clearer rules, strengthen policy directions that outline the provincial interest in land use planning, give municipalities a stronger voice and more independence in local land use decisions, and provide residents more opportunities for involvement and a greater say in land use decisions in their communities.

Through this review, the government said it is seeking to build on past improvements to ensure the Board can contribute within the system to its best effect.

The government is maintaining that it's important to have an independent appeal tribunal that can resolve some land use disputes. Not having an OMB would result in more appeals to the courts.

The review has been organized according to five themes: OMB's jurisdiction and powers; citizen participation and local perspective; clear and predictable decision-making; modern procedures and faster decisions; and alternative dispute resolution and fewer hearings.

Jones said there are a lot of municipalities in Dufferin-Caledon that will be interested in taking part in the review.

She also agreed the OMB is not perfect.

"Nobody's ever happy when they go to the OMB and lose," she remarked, but added everyone has the right to appeal decisions.