

NEC plan does not prohibit development, reader says

Dear Sir,

We are responding to the two articles in your July 19, 1989 edition entitled: "Hewitt under fire at NEC from environmentalist group" and "Eight members 'oppose plan'." We believe these articles are based on four assumptions that are incorrect:

- 1) development is not permitted under the Niagara Escarpment Plan;
- 2) the way to protect the escarpment is to have no development;
- 3) any member of the Niagara Escarpment Commission who votes in favor of any form of development is opposed to the Plan; and
- 4) Commission members who reject any form of development are "good" and those who vote in favor of development are "bad."

First of all, the Niagara Escarpment Plan describes the type of development permitted on the escarpment. It does not prohibit development.

The 725 kilometres of land that make up the escarpment corridor have been divided into seven land-use designations - each with its own specified level of permitted development. For example, land which falls into the "protection" or the "natural" designations can only be developed in very limited

ways whereas land with the designations of "rural" or of "urban" can have more development.

It is, therefore, incorrect to assume that the Niagara Escarpment Plan prohibits development. It is designed to provide a balance between development and preservation of this important resource. Indeed, a blanket prohibition would be the equivalent of expropriation without compensation and a level of government intervention that is not in our democratic tradition.

The second incorrect assumption is that the way to protect the escarpment is to have no development.

The plan is the result of the input from many different groups representing many different points of view across the development/preservation spectrum. This diversified input reflects Ontario's growing population of people with increasingly varied backgrounds and land-use interests. To suggest that a 725 kilometre corridor running up the centre of Ontario should be entirely unavailable for normal uses, invites wholesale rejection of the plan. A full-scale prohibition on development in the escarpment corridor would be overturned and put the escarpment lands at

greater risk than the current policy of controlled development.

The third assumption is that any member of the NEC who votes in favor of development is opposed to the plan.

As discussed earlier, the plan permits certain types of development depending on the land's classification and the proposal's merits within the plan. Some proposals will comply with the plan, some will be borderline, and some will not comply at all. Accordingly, every proposal must be judged on its own merit. It is important for commission members to know the plan and be able to apply it in a fair and objective fashion and not be influenced by pressure groups or personal biases. Clearly, a member who votes in favor of a development proposal can not be assumed to be opposed to the plan.

The fourth incorrect assumption is that commission members who reject any form of development are "good" and those who vote in favor of development are "bad."

If the members of the commission were to look at every application for development within the 725 kilometre corridor and simply say "No!", they would be in conflict with what the Niagara Escarpment Plan says. They would also

be in conflict with the right of every citizen to have an impartial hearing.

How can anyone suggest that blanket rejection of all development in the Niagara Escarpment corridor is the "spirit" or policy of the Niagara Escarpment Plan? If it were, why have a Niagara Escarpment Commission at all? Why not save the taxpayers money by having a part-time employee periodically stamp all applications for development with the word "Rejected," and leave it at that?

Surely, good commission members are those who know the

plan and apply it objectively to each development proposal. Bad commission members are those who are captive to the agenda of any single-interest lobby group.

The Niagara Escarpment Plan is a major step on the road to sustainable development. It is a shield against both "cut and slash" developers and "let's turn back the clock" romanticists.

Yours truly,
Kent and Lois McClure

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