

OMB won't be missed

Provincial ministers made a significant announcement recently, one that will not have been lost on anyone with an interest in municipal government and the ability of local planners and elected officials to shape communities in the interests of all stakeholders.

Addressing a long-standing promise, the province is embarking on an overhaul of the quasi-judicial Ontario Municipal Board (OMB).

The OMB has long been a contentious body. Unelected and unaccountable, board members can overrule elected officials on land-use matters, and have done so frequently.

(A 2009 study found that developers won 64 per cent of OMB appeals). Its legacy of running roughshod over municipal planning often deters councils from shelling out for the legal fees that are part and parcel of defending disputed proposals.

Many eyes were opened to the OMB's penchant for overreach when it overturned the Region of Waterloo's Official Plan in 2013. The plan called for limits on development on area farmland.

And once the OMB rules, municipalities are stuck with whatever dubious decision its appointed membership concocted. For example, Toronto can do nothing about a board ruling that permits a 35-storey condo tower to be built next to an elementary school on a site zoned for mid-rise development.

It seems that the OMB will be replaced by a Local Planning Appeal Tribunal, a body that will have less power to dictate what a community will look like, potentially tilting the balance of planning power back where it belongs — with communities.

The tribunal, instead of simply discarding a municipal decision, will check whether planning processes and land-use plans had been properly followed. New information raised during an appeal would have to be sent back to the city for reconsideration. Developers would no longer wield the OMB as a weapon.

And residents/local groups will no longer be shut out of the process due to the expense. People would receive legal and planning advice and representation at hearings.

Those who have long benefited from the OMB's largesse are raising concerns about a rise in NIMBYism, and the potential impact of special interests on elected officials.

But it's virtually impossible to muster any sympathy.

In future, developers are going to have to start collaborating with municipal planners instead of lawyering up.

This is tremendously positive news for Ontario communities.

The Independent & Free Press

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Letters to the editor

Climate change up for debate

Climate change has been going on since the Earth came into existence and will continue to its end. All that Ontario's Clean Energy Act has done is force small children and their parents into poverty. Our so-called leaders should be telling us how to cope rather than scaring us.

Even energy generated by water power has an effect on the environment in that carbon emission is generated when producing all of the machinery, dams, etc. involved. The same for nuclear, plus it generates heat which is not good for our lakes, and carbon emissions are generated in the storing of the waste fuel. And wind and solar are the biggest falsehoods being promoted.

Of course, most of the materials for these are produced overseas, powered by coal furnaces where there are few if any environmental controls. And to top it off, wind and solar are extremely inefficient and heavily subsidized by taxpayers. What we should realize is that our lockstep left-wing

zealots have made climate change a political issue so that we cannot have an intelligent debate anymore. I feel that our Western civilization is in decline and this, I think, is substantiated by the fact that we are not producing the brains to discover a new energy source. Do you know that not a single new energy source has been discovered since Rutherford split the atom over a hundred years ago? And just a footnote, the corn and soybean farmers in our area are doing quite well, thank you, due to warmer temperatures.

Bob Young

United and stronger than ever before

Our philosophy has always been in our name UNITED. At United Way, we work best when we work together. We accomplish most when we work with employers and donors, with volunteers and partners, and with sponsors and community agencies. We are at our best when we join forces.

Now, four United Ways have become one. We have UNITED. In April, the

United Ways of Burlington/Hamilton, Halton Hills, Milton and Oakville amalgamated into a single new organization: United Way Halton & Hamilton. Our new United Way serves more than one million people in communities from Stoney Creek to Acton and while our mission is unchanged, what is different is the organization that works to deliver on that mission.

As we evolve, we are maintaining our focus on the individual communities that make up our newly-expanded hometown, so our donors will still be able to give locally and to know that their contributions will stay close to home. You will always be able to support your closest neighbours.

This amalgamation will give our new United Way the tools to have an even greater community impact as we pursue the mission that has been so powerful for so long: To improve lives and build community by engaging individuals and mobilizing collective action.

This is an exciting time for your United Way. The changes we are undertaking today will enhance our community impact for years and decades to come.

Jeff Vallentin, chief executive officer