

Greater Toronto Services Board's urban sprawl report gets a rough ride at committee meeting

By IRENE GENTLE
The Champion

The Greater Toronto Services Board (GTSB) has a mandate to deal with transit issues in the GTA.

But that didn't prevent it from getting a rough ride at Monday's town administration and finance committee.

Particular wrath was reserved for the GTSB's draft Countryside Strategy report, a planning tool aimed at stopping urban sprawl from blanketing the GTA.

The report was blasted by councillors, who felt the GTSB is clueless about both planning and countryside issues.

Instead, the body made up of 40 GTA politicians should stick to transit, said Councillor Barry Lee.

"They should exclude planning principles because they don't know anything about planning and they don't know anything about conservation authorities," he said.

The countryside draft ignores the meticulous planning work achieved by Halton Region, said Mr. Lee.

"It was kind of insulting to all the work we've done."

Councillor Lieven Gevaert was equally unimpressed with the report, including the graphic on its front page.

"Their vision of the countryside was two horses standing in a meadow. I really took umbrage at that," he said. "I have concerns that people are using airy-fairy, uffy-fluffy stuff so that the GTSB can become another level of government."

If one level of government is done away with in the future, the GTSB will likely take its place, warned Mayor Gord Krantz, who

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BARRY LEE

sits on the board.

"That's not fear-mongering. That just happens to be the reality," he said. "It kind of scares me for the 905 areas."

Since GTSB votes are weighted by population, Toronto currently has about 50 per cent of the voting power, he said.

That means it wouldn't take much to push its own agenda.

"If you already have 50 per cent of the vote, you only have to lobby just a little bit, not too much," said Mr. Krantz. "They only need that one per cent and I don't imagine that'd be too hard on a critical issue."

The board has been searching for a purpose from its inception, noted Councillor John Challinor.

"Some of us kind of felt it was a body looking for a responsibility," he said. "In this report, I still see it looking for something and in a sense it may be creating straw men to knock down."

A GTSB report detailing GTA-wide challenges along with

response penned by Town CAO Mario Belvedere was before committee for approval. But some councillors felt the comments may have been too soft.

"This was a very difficult report to write. In being diplomatic, I've tried to avoid any political comment," responded Mr. Belvedere. He suggested that the committee's comments be included with the staff response and sent to the GTSB.

That was approved and will go before council for a final endorsement Tuesday. If approved, the entire package will be circulated to the GTSB, Halton Region and all area municipalities.

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