

Niagara Escarpment Commission recognized for visionary planning

The Niagara Escarpment Commission and the Niagara Escarpment Plan have received the 2004 Vision in Planning Award from the Canadian Institute of Planners (CIP).

The award recognizes long-standing plans that have improved the quality of life for a Canadian community.

"The Niagara Escarpment Commission is thrilled to be acknowledged as a visionary leader in Canadian planning by such a prestigious organization as CIP," said Don Scott, chair of the Niagara Escarpment Commission (NEC).

The NEC and the Niagara Escarpment Plan protect the 725-km escarpment, which crosses 22 local municipalities, three regions, four counties and the cities of Hamilton and Owen

Sound.

It's treasured for its natural environment, water resources, recreational amenities, farmlands and scenic vistas. In 1990, it won international acclaim as a World Biosphere Reserve by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

"The Niagara Escarpment Plan demonstrates that the ideals of sustainability are within our reach," Mr. Scott said. "We can enjoy a healthy environment with clean air, clean water and productive land, in balance with compatible development and economic prosperity, when we make the choice to do so and stick with that choice."

The NEC was established in 1973 to create Canada's first large-scale environmental land use plan. The 17-member com-

mission, representing the public-at-large and escarpment-area municipal governments, continues to oversee development in the plan area through a development permit process.

More than 80 per cent of the plan area is privately owned and maintained. There are also 117 public parks and open spaces, including the Bruce Peninsula national park, provincial parks and conservation authority lands, connected by the Bruce Trail walking path.

"Since its inception in 1985, the Niagara Escarpment Plan has had an increasingly positive impact on quality of life and the natural environment in the most populous and highly developed region in Canada," said CIP president Ron Shishido.

There's good and bad consultation going on in agricultural issues

If the merits of good government were to be judged by the amount of work it creates, not just for its own staff but for a broad range of others — everyone from farm organizations to consulting firms — the current provincial government is doing a great job.

As we work through the different consultations that have been undertaken by the Province in recent weeks, we find useful efforts and some that are questionable at best.

We have to rank the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources process that reviewed nuisance deer permits as exceptionally relevant.

At the other end of the scale, however, there are consultations underway now that have left farmers thinking their input is destined never to be seen again.

Although the Greenbelt Protection Act

OFA Paul Mistele Commentary

consultations are relatively new, they have left a lot of farmers shaking their heads in a combination of amazement and confusion.

Some are left with the impression the final report has already been written, before their input was presented.

The discussion paper circulated as part of this consultation has a number of sections that display a complete lack of knowledge of farming and the people who farm that land and live in the rural areas of the proposed greenbelt.

Urban residents in search of readily accessible open space seem to be the principle beneficiaries of the proposed greenbelt area, based on statements in the discussion paper.

It suggests a key of the greenbelt protection act would be to ensure a continuous and connected system of open spaces.

This ignores the reality that much of the open space land is privately-owned farmland.

Although there's legislation to protect a farmer's land from trespassers, the discussion paper fails to mention this critical detail.

While the final boundary lines for the Greenbelt Protection Act area haven't been defined, farmers are already expressing concerns that attempts to preserve farmland within that boundary will have negative impacts on farmlands in adjacent areas.

If urban growth is halted within the greenbelt area, the areas beyond the boundary will face increasing pressure for urban growth, and that will place extreme pressures on the farmlands outside the protected area.

It's projected that 115,000 new people will locate within the Greater Toronto Area each year for the foreseeable future.

These people will have to live somewhere, and will likely locate in the adjacent areas.

Now the Province has issued its 58-page discussion paper, 'Growth Management for the Greater Golden Horseshoe'. This reaches out to the countries and regions beyond the proposed greenbelt area — to places like Waterloo, Wellington, Dufferin, Brant, Simcoe, Durham, the Kawartha Lakes, Peterborough and Northumberland counties.

The Ministry of Public Infrastructure and Renewal is behind this latest process and has set September 24 as the deadline for public comment on its discussion paper.

Farmers with livestock to tend and crops to harvest must feel overwhelmed as they try to find the time to review all of these discussion papers and prepare comments to the government before the deadline.

The Ontario Federation of Agriculture's research department will prepare comments for submission to the government, but we encourage farmers to review the papers, talk to the federation and make independent submissions.

Paul Mistele is a member of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture executive committee.

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