

Balance sought for livestock facilities

Council to consider guidelines tomorrow

By MELANIE HENNESSEY

The Champion

Halton livestock facility guidelines aimed at supporting agricultural animal operations while addressing their co-existence with rural residents will be considered by regional council tomorrow.

Halton's planning and public works committee endorsed the guidelines at its meeting Wednesday, after a presentation by Director of Planning and Transportation Jane Clohecy.

She explained how the guidelines would apply, largely based on the provincial minimum distance separation (MDS) standards between livestock facilities and other land uses to reduce odour conflict.

She said in the case of urban area expansions and new non-farm uses, MDS would apply. With new or expanded non-farm uses on existing lots and new or expanding livestock operations, MDS would also apply, but a minor variance may be considered.

The provincial standards wouldn't apply if a farmer is replacing or improving his existing livestock facility.

For livestock conversions, best management practices — implemented to reduce odour conflict between farm and non-farm neighbours — would be used instead of MDS. "One of the key best management practices is to openly communicate with neighbours," the guidelines state. "For example, farmers can explain their farming practices to neighbours, provide informal notification prior to manure spreading, plant trees along the property lines, etc."

A report from Commissioner of Planning and Public Works Peter Crockett explained "The Provincial Policy Statement only requires the application of MDS for new and expanding livestock facilities, so the livestock guidelines offer a higher standard in protecting residential uses from odour impact."

Previously, Regional and Burlington Councillor John Taylor recommended the guidelines be amended to include special provisions for farm conversions in rural Burlington, above the Niagara Escarpment, given the unique mix of farm and non-farm uses in the area.

But, Mr. Crockett's report presented a list of reasons why staff don't support this amendment, including that an area-specific provision could weaken official plan policies that support agricultural viability and the area is under the jurisdiction of the Niagara Escarpment Plan, so the Region couldn't impose a special provision.

Halton Federation of Agriculture President John Opsteen sent a letter to committee voicing the federation's support of the guidelines. "I feel that these guidelines allow farmers to continue in their business and are flexible to adapt to changing market conditions while still respecting our neighbours in the countryside," he said.

"The plan also promotes good relations in the region between farm and non-farm citizens and recommends many ways in which relations can be improved."

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