

Comay Committee submits its recommendations

By ALF STONG
MPP—York Centre
The Committee established to review Ontario's Planning Act (the Comay Committee) has submitted its recommendations to the Provincial Government.

This Report was completed after 18 months of study, during which the Committee travelled across the province, meeting with municipal representatives, rural organizations, professional bodies, public groups and the development industry.

In effect, the Report confirmed many Opposition criticisms of the existing planning procedures in Ontario, which are characterized by the Committee as uncertain, inconsistent, with a built-in potential for delay and high cost.

The Committee's recommendations are an attempt to decentralize responsibility for planning decisions, and place it in the hands of elected rather than appointed officials.

One proposal is that the Minister should establish by regulation the maximum number of public agencies to be consulted in the consideration of subdivision plans and deadlines for the receipt of comments from these agencies.

Another very interesting recommendation is that the role of the Ontario Municipal Board should be severely limited to that of providing advice to the Minister where municipal decisions are characterized as being unfair.

If implemented, this proposal might eliminate the need for lengthy hearings such as those concerning the Toronto Core area plan, which are having a detrimental effect on construction employment.

There is some cause for concern in the fact that the Housing Minister has stated that it will be at least October of this year before he even begins to draft a White Paper on this subject — with no mention being made of a date for legislation.

After a lengthy study of this kind, involving

numerous meetings and briefs, surely the time has come for action, especially when we bear in mind that the Ontario Economic Council recommended limiting the power of the O.M.B. as long ago as 1973.

Many of the Committee's recommendations are of special interest to rural communities.

The zoning of rural land presents a particular case where provincial interests can be seriously affected if municipalities

are unable or unwilling to exercise a reasonable level of control over development.

At present, the Minister is able to freeze such land by means of statutory orders under Section 32 of The Planning Act.

Typically, these provide that no change in use or only limited changes may take place until the order has been amended or revoked.

Such orders are now in effect in many municipalities, and it is the Ministry's declared

intention that the orders will be lifted when the municipalities concerned adopt appropriate zoning by-laws.

However, the use of Section 32 orders presents serious problems in removing from the municipality the administration of its own land use controls, and in the awkwardness of securing minor changes through the use of centralized ministerial machinery.

In this connection, the Committee proposes that the Minister impose, universally, a "base level" rural by-law providing minimum rural zoning standards.

He should, it is felt, be empowered to exempt from this by-law, by regulation, those municipalities that already have adequate by-laws, that adopt such by-laws in the future, or where for particular reasons such by-laws are not necessary or appropriate.

Provincial interests can also be seriously affected by the unreasonable granting of land separation consents in rural areas.

The Ministry now monitors the activities of land division committees and committees of adjustment on a selective basis, and the Minister can appeal to the Municipal Board any specific consent decisions which are not in accordance with the Ministry's consent guidelines.

The Committee proposes that the responsibility for formulating rural consent policies should rest generally with county and regional councils; also that, like every other type of municipal planning

decision, the consent granting power should be dependent on the establishment of a satisfactory planning policy base for that purpose.

As with rural zoning, there should be a provincial "base level" rural consent policy, to be applied in those counties or regional municipalities where a satisfactory consent policy is lacking.

The Act should, in the Committee's opinion, be amended to require the Minister to establish and impose a provincial rural consent policy on a universal basis, allowing

him to exempt from this policy, by regulation, those counties and regional municipalities which already have suitable consent policies, which adopt such policies in the future, or where for particular reasons, a rural consent policy is not necessary or appropriate.

The responsibility for administering the provincial consent policy should rest with the county or regional councils, operating through their land division committees.

Also, the imposition of a provincial policy would be designed not to give the Minister supervision

over individual consents, but to provide a consistent province-wide basis for granting consents in accordance with provincial rural land use policies.

No recommendation is made for major changes in current compensation policy — compensation for acquisition but not regulation — therefore, no compensation to farmers for loss of development rights.

Badges will show length of service

Silver and gold maple leaves will be new additions to the uniforms of some York Regional Policemen.

The length of service badges were approved by the police commission last week.

For each five years of service, officers up to the rank of staff sergeant will receive silver maple leaves to be worn on the left tunic sleeve 3½ inches from the cuff.

For ranks above staff sergeant, gold leaves will be issue.

Badges will show tenure with the York Region force, added to service with local police departments previous to the formation of the YRP in 1971.

Officers with experience in other police departments also would be eligible for the badges on request.

Commissioner Ray Twinney said he favors the badges because "it does give the general public an idea of experienced men in the field."

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