

Regions pressure province to back moraine campaign

York, Durham and Peel seek commitment to protect entire moraine

BY PATRICK CASEY
Staff Writer

York has joined two neighbouring regions in asking the province to develop a long-term strategy to protect the entire Oak Ridges Moraine.

Earlier this month, Ontario's Natural Resources Ministry suggested housing should be banned on moraine lands in Richmond Hill. And just last week, the province submitted three colour maps to be used when an Ontario Municipal Board hearing begins May 29 on the fate of five developments proposed on the moraine in Richmond Hill.

The report proposes a corridor system more extensive than the 600-metre-wide greenspace the government previously endorsed and which could forever protect 80 per cent of Richmond Hill's moraine lands.

However, without a formal strategy, there is nothing to stop additional applicants from proposing new development projects on the moraine, argued Vaughan Regional Councillor Michael Di Biase, who wants Queen's Park to negotiate an agreement in conjunction with York, Peel and Durham regions.

"Everyone should apply pressure to the provincial government to come to the table and sit with the three regions," Di Biase said Thursday before regional council passed the recommendation.

"After the OMB hearing is over, a landowner can still come forward at another time and we will do it all over again."

Without the ammunition of a government policy, the region will be fighting moraine development application by application, Markham Regional Councillor Frank Scarpitti said.

But there's no reason to re-invent the wheel, countered Richmond Hill Mayor Bill Bell, who said a formal moraine strategy was endorsed by the development industry, politicians and environmental groups in 1994.

"In Richmond Hill, we are finally starting to be heard after banging our heads against the wall," Bell said.

"It's the continuation of the same thing, but more people are pushing it. I can't, for the life of me, understand why they can't accept it."

Amanda McWhirter, a spokesperson for Municipal Affairs Minister Tony Clement, said she can't speak about the 1994 strategy because the matter is now before the OMB, but did say a meeting will soon be arranged between Clement and the GTA regional chairpersons to discuss a long-term strategy.

However, McWhirter added the minister remains convinced local governments already possess the ability to protect environmentally sensitive lands.

Oak Ridges MPP Frank Klees said he supports a long-term strategy for the moraine, a 160-kilometre stretch of land that feeds more than 30 rivers and streams, including the Rouge, Don and Humber rivers.

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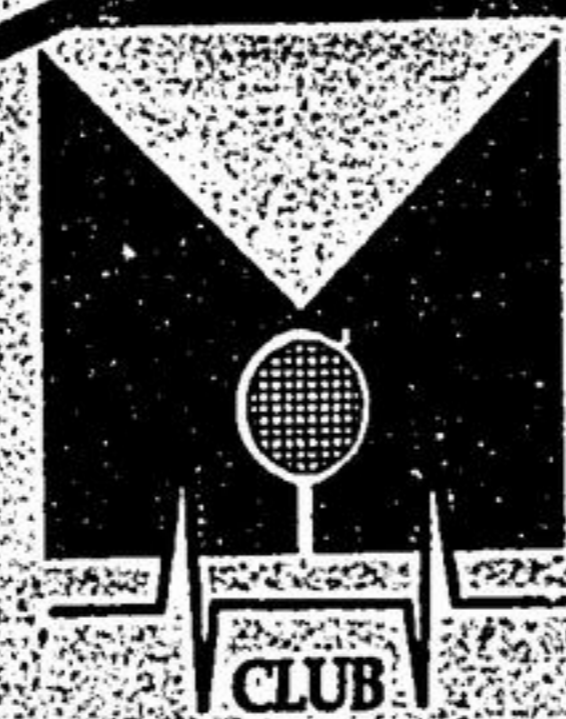


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