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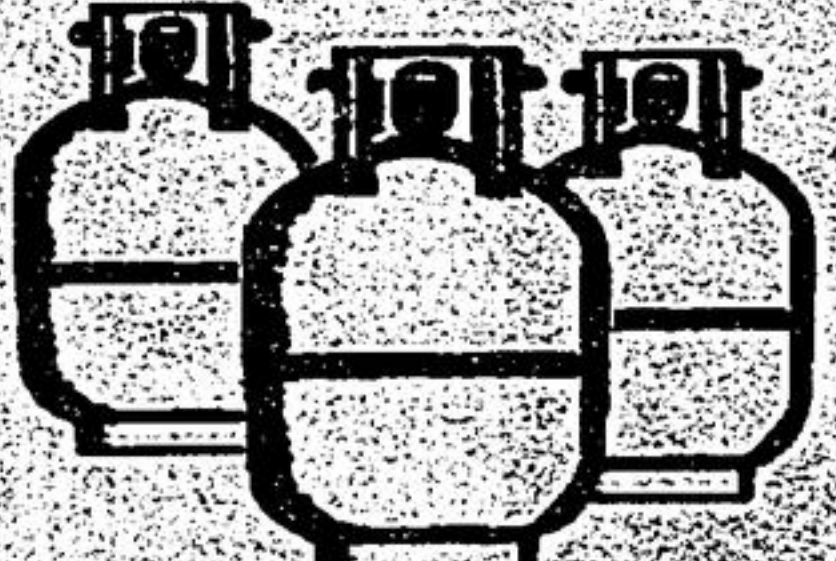


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Expert testifies development won't affect groundwater

BY MIKE ADLER
 Staff Writer

The impact of a mistake that introduces contaminants into the groundwater of the Oak Ridges Moraine may not be felt for generations, professor Ken Howard acknowledged yesterday.

"It becomes a legacy for our children and their children," Howard, an expert witness for developers hoping to build on the moraine in Richmond Hill, testified at an Ontario Municipal Board hearing.

The University of Toronto hydrogeology professor estimated that groundwater from the area, the source of Greater Toronto Area rivers, may take two centuries, or as long as 5,000 years, to reach Lake Ontario.

Howard, who testified carefully planned subdivisions will not hurt the moraine's vast groundwater supply, agreed with Save The Rouge Valley System lawyer Allan Heisey that some "conventional wisdom" on groundwater had changed in the last few decades.

But Howard stuck to his contention that the moraine, which stretches from Cobourg to Caledon, does not deserve any special protection as a resource.

Earlier, he said no plan for development on the moraine could leave the quality of its store of water completely unaffected.

"I think that's quite an unrealistic goal," Howard said. "There's no such thing as zero impact ... It becomes important to decide what degree of

impact is acceptable."

Lawyer Roger Bearman, representing the Town of Richmond Hill, challenged Howard's statement that proposed moraine developments meet the standards of OPA 200, Richmond Hill's official plan amendment for the area.

Shelved earlier this year, the amendment would only allow such development where environmental features and their connected systems can be "protected, enhanced, restored and sustained."

Protecting water resources, such as the area's kettle lakes, Howard argued, means "maintain(ing) the function to which that water body was intended or is used."

It would be nice to know what an acceptable degree of impact should be, Howard acknowledged, since Ontario has "reasonable use" guidelines on how much water quality is allowed to change through development, but they say nothing about water quantity.

One proposal, to put 2,700 homes around Bond Lake, would allow water to run into the lake from some back yards and makes minor alterations in the watershed because the development will leave more water to run off, Howard said, adding, "I think it's an appropriate thing to do."

He testified the effects of changes in the groundwater system would be evenly distributed along the moraine and rivers south of it and wouldn't be more pronounced in the immediate area.

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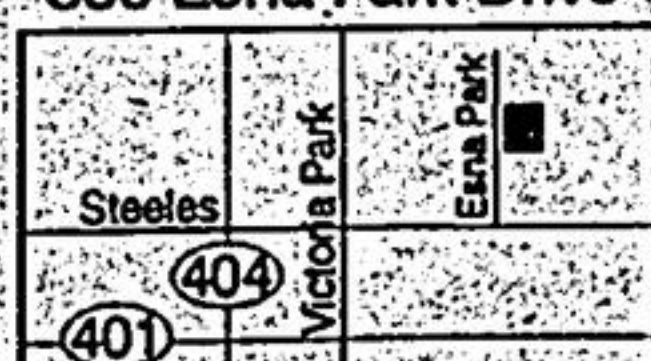
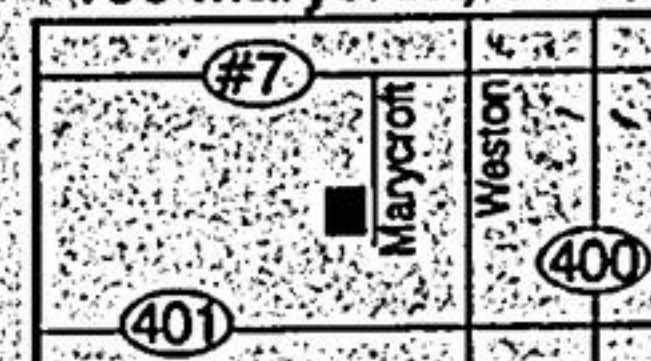
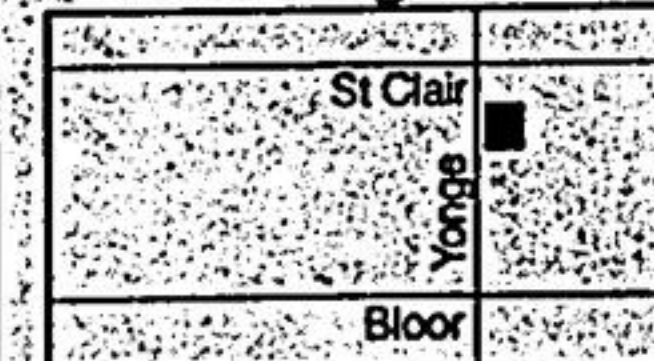
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