

Ex-cabinet minister wins approval

BY MIKE ADLER
Staff Writer

People opposing or supporting the Oak Ridges Moraine advisory panel's recommendations seem to all agree on one thing — David Crombie.

The year-long, wildly-expensive Ontario Municipal Board hearing on developing the moraine in Richmond Hill has been put into the hands of Crombie. Environmentalists, developers and politicians of every stripe appear to have no objection.

He has credibility on all sides of the fence, Richmond Hill Mayor Bill Bell said this week after the provincial government announced it had made the former Toronto mayor and federal Tory cabinet minister a mediator to bring the hearing to a speedy end.

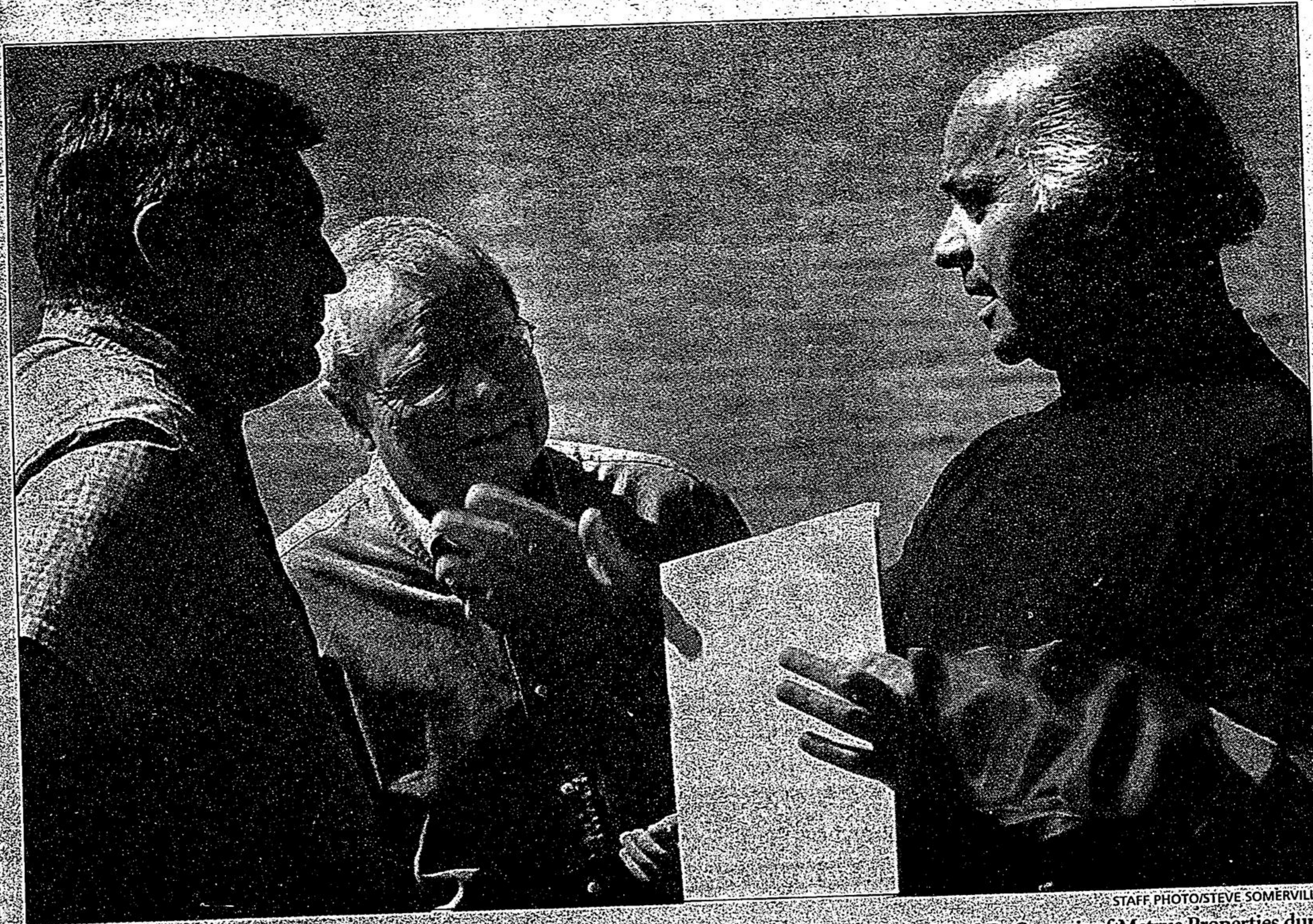
Crombie dabbles in development himself — he was part of a group that approached conservation authorities with golf course proposals recently — but he is also a long-time proponent of using ecosystem-wide planning for the moraine.

As head of the Waterfront Regeneration Trust, Crombie has pushed the idea that preserving the moraine is essential for Toronto.

"A healthy downtown and Lake Ontario waterfront are directly related to a healthy moraine," he stated two years ago when the group held a moraine summit in Markham.

In an interview Tuesday, Crombie said the moraine in Richmond Hill, where five developers have appealed to build 8,000 homes on either side of Yonge Street, "is the frailest part in terms of environment."

The one-time federal Progressive Conservative leadership candidate, who has already spent time reviewing positions at the hearing, said the process is one no one now wants to continue



STAFF PHOTO/STEVE SOMERVILLE

David Crombie, centre, talks with John Riley, left, a director at the Nature Conservancy of Canada, and Fred DeGasperis of Metrus Properties during Tuesday's media conference announcing recommendations of the Oak Ridges Moraine advisory panel. DeGasperis and Riley are on the committee, which was appointed by Ontario Municipal Affairs Minister Chris Hodgson.

after the province's freeze on moraine development ends in November.

"The process was long, frustrating and expensive for all sides," said Crombie, who by chance is a neighbour of one of the presiding board members in the case, James

Mills. "What it does show is the OMB is a very frail vehicle to determine public policy for the moraine."

Crombie also said "there has to be a sense of remediation" for builders who have a legal right to develop

Observers expect the province will support some kind of compensation package to settle the case. "What I think they're hinting at is they want to make some land swaps," Liberal MPP Mike Colle said.

Two developers involved, Fred

DeGasperis and Al Duffy, welcomed Crombie's help. "David Crombie is very fair and will be very professional," predicted Duffy, a former Richmond Hill mayor.

All provincial policies and official plans have recognized there will be development on the moraine in the Yonge Street corridor, he said.

"This will become the model for the way development should be done in other areas."

The provincial panel also voiced support for a continuous trail across the entire moraine and a "legacy trust" to purchase key corridor areas and encourage land stewardship.

These recommendations are supported by the Oak Ridges Trail Association, according to president Harold Sellers. Securing such a continuous footpath is the nine-year-old ORTA's main aim, he said in a statement.

Liberal critic to hike moraine, says report 'weak'

MPP Mike Colle, who says the job of saving the Oak Ridges Moraine is not over, is putting on his hiking shoes again.

The Liberal Party's critic for the moraine, Colle made local headlines last summer when he hiked over long portions of the landform, hoping to prompt the governing Tories into action to save it.

Now that a provincially-appointed panel has issued its draft plan for the moraine, Colle still thinks a second trek is

necessary.

"It's a reminder to people that we're still here, we still care and we're not going away," he said this week.

This time, the MPP will begin at 9 a.m. Sunday with what he calls an easy walk from Eaton Hall Lake near the King Township campus of Seneca College. It's a beautiful, beautiful spot.

On Monday morning, Colle will start a much longer journey from Port Perry to Caledon. He plans to

reach Ballantrae Tuesday, come through parts of Aurora and Richmond Hill on Wednesday and start Thursday from King.

The environmental group Save The Oak Ridges Moraine is also active in King this weekend, promoting a variety of adventure events, with registration at King City Secondary School.

Colle was harsh on the panel's draft report, calling it "woefully weak" and arguing its recommendations would form a protective

shield for the moraine that cannot withstand future decades of development pressure. "If you make the shield out of paper it's not going to last very long."

He also charged the government seeks to get comments from open houses instead of public meetings so the draft report avoids public debate. "Who says there's consensus? Who says people have agreed?" Colle asked.

— Mike Adler

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