

EDITORIAL

Time to scrap the OMB

Forgive us if you've heard this one before.

The provincial government has pledged to reform the controversial, unelected, unaccountable Ontario

Municipal Board (OMB).

Longstanding opponents of this quasi-judicial body, which is empowered to overturn planning decisions made by democratically elected officials, will know reforms have long been promised - typically at election time.

Politicians, community groups, environmentalists and others have denounced the OMB as little more than an adversarial mechanism through which developers exert their will on a reluctant community.

Just the threat of a lengthy OMB hearing, with its inherent legal expenses, can intimidate a municipality into a settlement the community opposes.

Recently, Springwater Mayor Bill French was shocked to learn the county had agreed to allow an additional 3,000 people in a massive project in Midhurst without input from his township. The decision averted an OMB hearing.

Was anyone truly surprised?

The public perception that the OMB often acts as an arm of the development industry is well founded.

In a recent decision, a panel of divisional court judges struck down an OMB directive to the Town of Richmond Hill. The OMB had (astonishingly) set a cap on how much green space the town could demand from condo builders - in essence acting as an agent for the construction industry.

A couple of years ago, the OMB overruled an Official Plan that took Waterloo Region eight years to produce. The OMB wanted 10 times more land designated for development than had been allotted.

Some cities have tried to extricate themselves from OMB jurisdiction out of sheer frustration.

As far as reforms are concerned, the province will consult with stakeholders.

Preliminary proposals would limit the OMB's ability to hear appeals and completely overturn decisions. They would prevent appeals of secondary plans, which are neighbourhood-specific plans, for two years and promote mediation over adversarial hearings.

Would that be an improvement? Sure.

But, the best solution would be for Minister of Municipal Affairs Bill Mauro to scrap this noxious board once and for all.

Let's hope that's the message stakeholders deliver to Queen's Park.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Silver lining around dark American cloud

Re: Here's hoping Canada gets leader like Trump, Oct. 10.

Progressives may take comfort from the silver lining around the dark American cloud. Donald Trump may be on his way not only to losing the presidency and the republican majority in the house of representatives, but also to bringing down the GOP itself.

Dare we hope that republican obstructionism will come to an end when Clinton II delivers the change promised by Obama? America could then see real progress and bridge the chasm deepened by Trump.

For this, let us pray.

SALVATORE (SAL) AMENTA
STOUFFVILLE

Mayor right not to sign land fill permit

Re: Mayor refuses to sign land fill permit, Sept. 22.

I say good for Mayor Justin Altmann. He and other councillors asked for some information that the consultant could not provide. Hence, he and others asked for a two-week delay to gather the information.

I need to remind Stouffville of something. Years ago, dumps in Stouffville polluted the water. This pollution caused illness in many citizens and is highly suspected of increasing cancer rates and miscarriages in Stouffville.

Look up Whitchurch-Stouffville in Wikipedia and the CBC archives. You will not like what you read.

Was it proof of something? Not for sure, but it was for sure that rates were higher in Stouffville.

Certainly, a curiosity.

A requirement that the mayor sign something against his conscience or duty is not binding law. The law always allows for extraordinary situations and reasonableness of violation.

There is of course a requirement that Mayor Altmann and other councillors demonstrate legitimate concern and offer a request for a reasonable delay of conscience.

The fact Councilor Hugo Kroon and others could not wait 2 weeks to be better informed and to have even more weight upon their side (I assume) raises questions.

Was this about proper procedure or a conflict of us versus them? Was this about what is good for the citizens or 'good for me and my side'?

RON BOYD
STOUFFVILLE



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