

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE AUGUST 20, 2001

OAKRIDGES MORaine JOINT REPORT OF THE REGION OF DURHAM, PEEL AND YORK

Recommendation

The Commissioner of Planning recommends that:

The City of Vaughan supports the Region of Durham, Peel and York on their joint initiative for *The Oak Ridges Moraine Proposals for the Protection and Management of a Unique Landscape*

The Province of Ontario consider "*The Oak Ridges Moraine Proposals for the Protection and Management of a Unique Landscape*" as input into the Provincial initiative on protecting the Oak Ridges Moraine;

The City of Vaughan request to be kept informed and consulted on a regular basis on the development of longterm strategy for the Oak Ridges Moraine;

The Council Minutes be sent to the Region of Durham, Region of Peel, Region of York, the Premier of Ontario, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, the Minister of Natural Resources and the Minister of Environment.

Purpose

To update Council on the initiative by the Regions of Durham, Peel and York on the development of a joint long-term strategy for the Oak Ridges Moraine and to provide the City of Vaughan's comments on the report "*The Oak Ridges Moraine Proposals for the Protection and Management of a Unique Landscape, May 2001*".

Background

In 1998, Durham, Peel and York Regional Councils directed their staffs to co-ordinate a joint long-term strategy for the Oak Ridges Moraine. A September 1999 discussion paper, "The Oak Ridges Moraine: Towards a Long Term Strategy," described the background, history and importance of the Oak Ridges Moraine, and discussed in detail the current policy context, the state of the natural heritage and hydrogeological data, and land securement programs. The discussion paper put forward a case and process for the Province, the Regions and other interested parties to work together toward developing a long term strategy for the Moraine. On December 9, 1999, York Region Council endorsed the preparation of a coordinated long-term strategy for the Oak Ridges Moraine, including the preparation of a Policy Statement under Section 3 of the Planning Act.

On July 10, 2000, Vaughan Council adopted the following resolution:

"That the May 11, 2000, resolution of York Regional Council regarding the Oak Ridges Moraine be endorsed;

That the City of Vaughan requests the Province to immediately join with the Regions of York and Durham and Peel to develop a Long Term Strategy for the Oak Ridges Moraine;

That the City of Vaughan requests that it be kept informed and consulted on a regular basis as part of the development of a Long Term Strategy for the Oak Ridges Moraine.

That this resolution be sent to York Region, all area municipalities in York Region and the Regions of Durham and Peel and also to the Premier of Ontario, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, the Minister of Environment, and all MPPs in York Region, Peel Region and Durham Region.”

“*The Oak Ridges Moraine Proposals for Protection and Management of a Unique Landscape, May 2001*” is a collaborative effort by the Oak Ridges Moraine partnership, which includes the Regions of Durham, Peel and York, Counties of Simcoe, Peterborough, Dufferin and Northumberland, Kawartha Lakes, the nine Conservation Authorities having jurisdiction on the Moraine and the Ministries of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Natural Resources and Environment. The report was made available for public comment and input on May 10, 2001.

The report proposes strategic directions in four areas, as discussed individually below:

1. Groundwater Management
2. Natural Heritage Data Management
3. Policy
4. Land Securement

1. Groundwater Management: The report identifies that an improved understanding of the interrelationship between ground water systems and surface water and natural features is necessary to support better land use decisions. To assist in achieving this objective, the report notes that a co-ordinated and consolidated approach to gathering, analyzing and managing hydrogeology data and formulating policy to protect groundwater resources is required.

The report identifies current groundwater management initiatives including a Committee established in 2000 comprised of Durham, Peel and York Regions and the Conservation Authorities with jurisdictions with the Regions to develop a comprehensive Groundwater Management Strategy for the three Regions, with a focus on completing information on areas of the Moraine where data gaps currently exist.

Groundwater Management issues that need to be considered include:

- Sensitive groundwater conditions including (degree of recharge potential, domestic water supply, contamination, maintenance of stream baseflow etc.);
- Stresses and threats to groundwater on the Moraine (development pressure, groundwater domestic use, golf courses, potential contamination from septic systems, landfills, stormwater, agricultural activities, etc);
- Data and information gaps;
- Administrative and Institutional Issues (lack of co-ordination among agencies, incomplete data, inconsistent policies among jurisdictions etc.

The report recommends the development of an overall Groundwater Management Strategy for the Oak Ridges Moraine and the acceleration of high priority action. The work is proposed to be co-ordinated with the three Regions’ Groundwater Management Study and would include the following:

- A regionally-led groundwater data system to be managed possibly by one of the Conservation Authorities or a university in one publicly accessible format;
- The establishment of common standards for data collection;

- Each Region and local municipality to adopt model policies for groundwater management prepared as part of the three Region Groundwater Strategy;
 - A program for the completion of watershed studies by Conservation Authorities for “priority” watersheds, identified by the three Regions Groundwater Strategy should be accelerated;
 - Identification of significant recharge and discharge areas for protection in regional Official Plans;
 - The establishment of criteria through the three Region Groundwater Strategy to define which watershed lands should be brought into public ownership and performance standards for proposed land uses and groundwater withdrawals;
 - The three Regions to hire hydrogeologists as part of establishing a hydrogeology coordinating committee with the Conservation Authorities, the Province and other partners to establish programs for monitoring and tracking the long-term effectiveness of the Groundwater Management Strategy.
2. Natural Heritage Data Management: The report proposes the creation of coordinated accessible data and mapping management system with common data standards to provide better analysis, predictive ability and monitoring that will provide the basis for good public policy on the Oak Ridges Moraine
- Creation of a regionally-led co-ordinated centralized data system for the Oak Ridges Moraine, with each local jurisdiction having control of local data;
 - Natural heritage data with the exception of data on vulnerable, threatened and endangered species should be available to all stakeholders;
 - The Ecological Land classification (ELC) system at the Community Series level is recommended as the standard;
 - Conservation Authorities should prepare a strategy for the completion of the ELC work for the Oak Ridges Moraine portions of their respective jurisdictions on a priority basis;
 - The first priority for data update should be the Oak Ridges Moraine;
 - Arcview/ArcInfo should be the common Geographic Information Systems (GIS);
 - Updating information on a regular basis will be essential;
 - Municipal and Conservation Authority staff should begin to develop a prototype of a regional scale greenlands system policy framework based on ELC data sets that specifically identify key corridors and linkages;
 - The establishment of a common data management system for the Oak Ridges Moraine will require financial support from all parties;
 - A technical committee composed of the conservation authorities, and provincial, regional, county and local municipal staff should ensure co-ordination and implementation of the data management system;

3. Policy: The report proposes revisions to the Provincial Policy Statement and Regional Official Plans to strengthen public policy on the Oak Ridges Moraine. The report notes that the 1994 draft Oak Ridges Moraine Strategy was used as a guide for the policy recommendations, which are listed below:

The Provincial Policy Statement should be amended to:

- Refer specifically to the protection and enhancement of glacial moraines and in particular the Oak Ridges Moraine;
- Require the identification of corridors and linkages;
- Require hydrogeological studies based on the principle of water balance;
- Protect tableland woodlots;
- Establish minimum 30 metre buffers from key environmental features; and
- Include landform conservation policies to maintain visual and physical form, character and a variety of landscapes;

Municipal Policies

Municipal policies on natural heritage, water resources and landform conservation should be harmonized and strengthened, starting with Regional Official Plans and proceeding at the same time as preparations and public consultation on changes to the Provincial Policy Statement.

Five major natural heritage policy gaps are identified in the report. Regional Official Plans should be amended to:

- Identify and protect strategic ecological corridors and linkages;
- Establish minimum buffers around sensitive features;
- Make landform conservation policies stronger and more consistent;
- Work with partners to identify and protect tableland woodlots; and
- Identify and protect sensitive hydrogeologic features.

Existing Regional Official Plans and policies should be amended to:

- Adopt a consistent no-development policy for core natural heritage features;
- Establish a minimum 30 metre buffer for wetlands and Core Natural Areas;
- Generally prohibit development in kettle lake and wetland kettle basins;
- Establish a minimum 30 metre riparian buffer for cold-water streams;
- Publicly secure buffers;
- Identify and protect recharge and discharge areas;
- Adopt a water balance approach for sensitive areas;
- Provide strong support for private land stewardship;
- Maintain water balance in dry kettles;
- Identify and protect headwater streams;
- Require cumulative impact analysis in environmental Impact Statements; and
- Include consistent landform conservation policies.

Development proposals should include documentation identifying how natural heritage systems and environmental standards, policy and criteria have been addressed.

Continuous updating of natural heritage data will lead to more effective policy implementation. Working together, the Regions and the Conservation Authorities should:

- Update Environmentally Significant Area data;
 - Update floodplain data, especially in urban areas;
 - Complete wetland identification;
 - Identify corridors and linkages;
 - Identify recharge and discharge areas;
 - Identify tableland woodlots; and
 - Improve habitat data for Vulnerable Threatened and Endangered Species.
4. Land Securement: The report proposes a consistent, co-ordinated approach to securement activity, through a broad range of securement tools starting with protection from development by policy, a stewardship program to assist landowners in the conservation of their land, and ultimately, if these mechanisms fail, a land acquisition program. The report recommends the following strategic directions:
- Protection and enhancement through policy be the first approach;
 - A coordinated stewardship program be established and funded by partners
 - Acquisition of strategic properties on the Oak Ridges Moraine should be co-ordinated by partners with a protocol for consultation and criteria for [property acquisition (includes purchase, donations, transfers through the development process)]
 - A coordinated funding program be established;
 - The three Regions to take a lead role with their partners and bring forward a report on recommended model by December 31, 2001, which will examine options based on the following principles:
 - Shared responsibility means shared contributions. All levels of government should participate;
 - Government cannot be expected to do this alone. Public money should leverage private sector money and contributions from the general public;
 - The report should consider carefully whether or not there should be a Greater Toronto Area wide program or one based locally (perhaps based on each of the three Regions or each of the nine Conservation Authorities.)
 - It is estimated that an overall annual budget of approximately \$5-\$10 million is required to fund securement. This amount will need to be internally negotiated each year by each contributing agency.
 - Management plans are required for all lands acquired, to ensure their long-term health

Public Consultation

The Regions held a symposium and a series of public open house and information meetings in June 2001 on the recommended approach. Vaughan Planning Staff attended the symposium and one of the public information meetings. The comments received back on the report, will also assist the Regions in formulating a submission to the recently announced Provincial initiative on the Oak Ridges Moraine.

Provincial Initiative on the Oak Ridges Moraine

Since the Regions' undertaking in 1998 to develop a Longterm Strategy for the Oak Ridges Moraine, the Province of Ontario on May 17, 2001 approved the Oak Ridges Moraine Protection Act, 2001. The Oak Ridges Moraine Protection Act has put in place a six month moratorium on

development applications on the Moraine in order to permit consultation among the affected stakeholders leading to a long-term Oak Ridges Moraine strategy. The Province has indicated that the strategy will set out clear rules, identify roles and responsibilities, and will clearly define areas for development or protection.

Analysis and Comment

Vaughan Planning Staff agree with the Regions' strategic directions to establish an overall groundwater management strategy for the Moraine, with consistent data and criteria, on which land use decisions across the Moraine can be based. The completion of groundwater and natural heritage data in those areas where data gaps currently exist is necessary to complete and implement the strategy.

Vaughan Planning Staff note that many of the strategic policy directions reflect the policies in Official Plan Amendment 600 with some notable exceptions including, but not limited to, a minimum 30 m buffer from key environmental features. Other specific policy initiatives such as the identification of ecological corridors and significant recharge areas for protection reflect the need, as also noted in the Regions' report, for the preparation of additional consistent groundwater and natural heritage data.

A land securement strategy which involves not only the Local and Regional governments, but also Provincial and Federal levels in a funding program, is proposed. The Regions will be bringing forward a report on a recommended model by December 31, 2001. It is recommended that the Regions provide opportunities for consultation with the local municipalities as input to the preparation of the report on a funding program.

In several areas of the Strategic Directions, it is noted that the Regions or the Regions with the Conservation Authorities, should be taking the lead role. While this approach may provide certain advantages to achieve a co-ordinated approach across the Moraine, consultation between the Regions and the local municipalities on these matters must be maintained. The local municipalities are the approval authority on most development applications and as such, have a key role in implementing the strategic directions as they relate to development approvals.

It is noted that the portion of OPA 600 located on the Oak Ridges Moraine was not included in the Region's June 29, 2001 approval of the Plan, being subject to The Oak Ridges Moraine Protection Act, May 2001. It is expected that any changes which the Province may make to the Provincial Policy Statement as part of its initiative on the Moraine, will need to be reflected and incorporated into the moraine portion of OPA 600, prior to approval.

Conclusion

Planning Staff have reviewed the report, *"The Oak Ridges Moraine Proposals for the Protection and Management of a Unique Landscape, May 2001"* and are in general agreement with the recommended Strategic Directions.

While Staff note that several details remain to be worked out on the implementation of the Strategic Directions, it does provide a comprehensive basis for further actions by all levels of government and agencies, aimed at protecting the important functions and natural features of the Oak Ridges Moraine.

Attachments

1. The Oak Ridges Moraine Proposals for the Protection and Management of a Unique Landscape, May 2001 (MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF COUNCIL ONLY)

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Respectfully submitted,

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