



STORM COALITION INC.
Save The Oak Ridges Moraine

Seasonal Stormette

January 1993

This is both an editorial and an alert to all friends of the Oak Ridges Moraine and the environment in general.

The year 1993 could well turn out to be a critical landmark in Ontario land-use planning. Sometime this year, the Commission on Planning and Development Reform, chaired by John Sewell, will submit its final report. New ideas about planning are also circulating in various provincial ministries, and in agencies such as the Office of the Greater Toronto Area (OGTA). We could be moving towards important changes in provincial legislation and policy bearing on the environment.

Along with other members of STORM Coalition, I have been following the apparent trends in the Commission's thinking as published in their periodic New Planning News. I have liked some of what I've seen, such as an emphasis on the need for clearer policy statements about planning by the province. And I sympathize, albeit in a cautious, qualified way, with the Commission's desire to make the planning process less byzantine, time-consuming and costly for all concerned.

Commission Recommends: Province Out of Approvals

But I was rocked back on my heels when, at a public hearing, Chairman Sewell told STORM representatives flatly that the Commission is recommending that the province remove

itself right out of the business of approving land-use plans.

Everything in my experience of zoning and land-use battles tells me that would be a disaster. I do not think municipal politicians are worse people than other politicians; I have known some first-class ones. But I do think municipal politicians, close to the grass-roots as they are, are also much more exposed than are federal and provincial politicians to raw, direct pressures from financially interested parties - especially developers and other land-interested parties! Particularly in small and medium-sized urban fringe municipalities, they don't have platoons of deputies and executive assistants to deflect much of the heat.

Ecosystem Planning

It can certainly be argued that up to the present, the province's role in land-use policy has left a great deal to be desired. But that is a reason for the province to pull up its socks and do better - not simply drop out of the game. If we are truly to make ecosystemic and watershed planning realities in Ontario, rather than just decorative buzzwords for ministerial speeches and development applications, the province must play an active role - in part for the simple reason that ecosystems and watersheds do not conform to municipal boundaries.

I hope that many others whose experiences point to the same conclusion will speak up on this matter. I hope too that more generally, everyone who cares about the Oak Ridges Moraine and other aspects of our natural environment will follow the planning reform process over the next few months with an especially watchful eye and make clear to both the Commission and to the provincial government what they want.

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