

Coalition asks municipalities to push province on EA changes

Angela Gismondi February 1, 2018

A coalition of industry stakeholders has been pressing the Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change (MOECC) to make necessary changes to the environmental assessment (EA) process and now they are urging municipalities across Ontario to do the same.

The Ontario Good Roads Association (OGRA), in conjunction with the Municipal Engineers Association (MEA) and the **Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario (RCCAO)**, recently sent out a draft resolution on the Municipal Class Environmental Assessment (MCEA) campaign to all heads of council and municipal clerks in Ontario.

“The MEA is calling on municipal councils to assist our push to improve the Class EA process,” states a letter sent to MEA members. “For this campaign to gain traction, the involvement of municipalities across Ontario is vital.”

Last February, a joint application for EA review was submitted through the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario and forwarded to the MOECC. The ministry responded positively to the application in mid-April 2017 and committed to completing a comprehensive review by December 2018. According to the letter, little progress was made in 2017.

“We’re trying to articulate that this is a widespread concern across the province to the ministry and get them to get moving,” said Scott Butler, manager of policy and research with the OGRA.

“We’re trying to demonstrate to the province that the municipal governments are frustrated with the current state of affairs and we’re working in conjunction with some like-minded stakeholders to ensure that both the people at the province are aware of the frustration at the local level while also letting private sector interests and professional sector interests have an equitable voice in this process.”

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— **Andy Manahan**

RCCAO

Municipalities large and small have responded by passing resolutions for reform. At the beginning of November, the City of Toronto directed its city manager to write to the minister of the environment asking to have the application for review of the MCEA process accelerated.

“The response we’ve been getting has been overwhelmingly positive. If the response we’ve had so far exceeds what we thought we would have in terms of resolutions passed to this date, I suspect a month from now we’ll be in a very good position to demonstrate to the government that this is a broad concern and that there is a lot of interest in seeing a fruitful resolution put forward,” Butler stated.

The process has been very slow to date, said Andy Manahan, executive director of the RCCAO, who stated he cannot see the review being concluded by the end of the year.

“I think it’s going to be difficult for the province to meet their self-imposed deadline,” Manahan commented, adding the MOECC has not announced a consultation schedule yet for the process.

“They seem to recognize through our application that they should be streamlining the Class EA process. At the rate we’re going, I don’t think we’re going to get much substantive change before the election.”

The MOECC has put a team in place however, Manahan reported.

“Late last year they established an internal working group...a small team that’s tasked with facilitating a consultation process,” he said.

Manahan explained there was a change in the minister and the new minister likely had to be brought up to speed, but “the length of time is unacceptable.”

The Ontario government is running out of time to implement legislative and policy changes before the June election, Butler also pointed out.

“We’re under the tight timelines that are being imposed by an election and all the uncertainty and the blackout period that are triggered by a general election. We would like to see some resolution to this issue prior to that,” said Butler.

It would be ideal to have amendments put in place before the next intake for federal infrastructure funding, he added.

“The concern we have for municipalities is that if reform isn’t enacted we stand to lose out potentially on some projects that would otherwise be considered shovel-ready and therefore eligible for federal funding,” he said.