

EASING BURDENS



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The **Town of Caledon** has added its voice to calls for implementation of a promised review designed to streamline the environmental assessment process for municipal infrastructure projects.

February 20, Caledon council adopted a recommendation that the provincial Ministry of Environment and Climate Change complete a review of the Municipal Class Environmental Assessment that had been promised in 2016. The review is intended to speed up the review process by reducing any duplication of studies and thus save time and money for municipalities like Caledon.

“Having to spend two years in an EA [Environmental Assessment] process is onerous,” Caledon CAO **Mike Galloway** told *NRU*. “It’s onerous for our budgets [and] it’s onerous on the time in which we can essentially get the project done.”

Galloway said that the current EA process typically lasts two years and costs thousands of dollars for studies by consultants. He said that in many cases municipalities are asked to complete studies already done by others but not recognized by the current Municipal Class Environmental Assessment process.

“It [the pending review] is ensuring that the duplication can be minimized within all the different acts that require approval to get any project moving forward, and EA processes are one of those.” He said.

Meanwhile, the Ontario Good Roads Association, the Municipal Engineers Association and the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario have also called for a modernization of the environment assessment review process.

“We think that perhaps the [provincial] minister could delegate – either some or all of this [the process] to staff,” Municipal Engineers Association president **John Thompson** told *NRU*. He says the current process requires input from multiple government departments that he says causes needless delays in providing approvals for infrastructure projects. Speeding up the approval process, while still respecting environmental issues, he said, is “one of the ideas we’ve suggested.”

The multi-organization coalition also has proposed a reduction in the time allowed for so-called ‘bump-up’ requests where a member of public can request a bump up of the assessment to the minister

of the environment, if they have environmental or other concerns. According to critics, that typically adds about 10 months to the approval process for municipal infrastructure. Currently, nearly 95 per cent of these requests are eventually turned down by the ministry, resulting in unnecessary delays to projects, according to the coalition. It also seeks a change in regulations that would eliminate a requirement on municipalities to conduct studies already done by others.

Thompson said his organization assisted in the creation of the MCEA [Municipal Class Environmental Assessment] process decades ago. “We shepherded it way back in the late 80s so municipalities could do the work they always do, and meet all the requirements of the environmental assessment act,” he said. “We’re very interested because it’s our document.”

Since its creation, the assessment review process has not been updated, critics say, despite a rise in the average cost of environmental assessment. An analysis from 2014 found that assessment costs increased from approximately \$125,000 dollars to \$365,000 dollars between 2010 and 2014, Residential and Civil

Construction Alliance of Ontario executive director **Andy Manahan** told *NRU*.

“When the environmental assessment legislation came through in the 1970s the planning act really didn’t look at environmental matters very carefully,” he said. “But now we have provincial policy statements, we have a lot of other water-based initiatives, clean water act, and so forth, where all of these things must be looked at already by the municipality.”

In addition to Caledon and other local governments, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario also backs completion of the review.

“We certainly see an advantage to expedite the process,” AMO president **Lynn Dollin** told *NRU*. “We definitely support going forward with this review in a way that still allows for consultation with the public and lots of opportunity for the public to get involved, but at the same time doesn’t duplicate processes.”

Manahan notes that after a 2016 report by the provincial auditor general, the review was expected to be completed by last November. He expressed concern that this year’s provincial election could further delay a timetable for implementation. 🌱