

Testimony of Debbe Crandall, B.Sc.

In May 2001, the province of Ontario via the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing enacted the Oak Ridges Moraine Protection Act, which effectively halted all planning matters on the Oak Ridges Moraine (the moraine) for six months. This action by the government was precipitated by a decades-long grassroots campaign to protect the moraine from increasing pressures to provide housing, employment and other urban services. In 1991 the provincial government established a three year planning study and created a multi-party Technical Working Committee to provide oversight. I was appointed to represent STORM (incorporated as a not-for-profit organization in 1990 to promote the long-term protection of the Oak Ridges Moraine through provincial legislation) on this technical committee from 1991-1993 and then appointed as the chair of the Citizens' Advisory Panel from 1993-1994 as the public liaison arm. The recommendations from the TWC were submitted to the province in December 1994 but were never acted upon.

By May 2001, the government was forced to take action. It was generally recognized that land use planning and resource management on the Oak Ridges Moraine required strategic leadership from the provincial government as municipal councils did not have the necessary planning tools to protect the moraine's vital ecology and hydrology.

The government's intention by taking this step was to provide the necessary time to develop a long-term action plan for the moraine. Minister Hodgson convened a multi-party advisory panel chaired by Ron Vrancart to be supported by an inter-ministerial team comprised of senior political and bureaucratic staff. The Oak Ridges Moraine Advisory Panel comprised representatives of the private sector (urban development, aggregates and agriculture), public sector (regional municipalities, conservation authorities), non-government sector (regional and provincial environmental organizations and academia). I was appointed by the Minister as a representative of Save the Oak Ridges Moraine Coalition (STORM).

The primary task for the advisory panel was to develop a series of recommendations to the Minister on a long-term strategy to protect the Oak Ridges Moraine by providing clear rules on where and what kind of land use and activities would be permitted. The advisory panel met during the month of July 2001 and delivered a series of recommendations to the Minister, which formed the basis for the *Share Your Vision for the Oak Ridges Moraine* (August-September 2001), a public consultation document. The Ontario legislature was unanimous in its support and

on December 14, 2001 voted to enact the *Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Act*. On April 22, the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan (ORMCP) was approved as a regulation under the Act.

While the recommendations provided to the government were primarily focused on prohibiting urban development and other matters under the *Planning Act*, there was also recognition that essential public services such as roads, pipelines associated with water and waste-water servicing would have to be accommodated within a new environmental policy regime - hence, section 41 (Infrastructure) of the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan. This infrastructure section was written in response to the advisory panel's acknowledgement of the linearity of these essential public services and that while they may be considered 'essential' all efforts must be made to situate them to avoid disruption of the moraine's significant ecological and hydrological features and functions. Hence, all projects would have to demonstrate that there is a need for the project and that no reasonable alternative exists. If there is a reasonable alternative then it stands that that alternate location would be chosen to avoid disruption of the moraine's significant ecology and hydrology.

The ORMCP's vision for the moraine is that of "a continuous band of green rolling hills that provides form and structure to south-central Ontario, while protecting the ecological and hydrological features and functions that support the health and well-being of the region's residents and ecosystems".

The *Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Act, 2001* establishes the following objectives for the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan.

- (a) protecting the ecological and hydrological integrity of the Oak Ridges Moraine Area;
- (b) ensuring that only land and resource uses that maintain, improve or restore the ecological and hydrological functions of the Oak Ridges Moraine Area are permitted;
- (c) maintaining, improving or restoring all the elements that contribute to the ecological and hydrological functions of the Oak Ridges Moraine Area, including the quality and quantity of its water and its other resources;
- (d) ensuring that the Oak Ridges Moraine Area is maintained as a continuous natural landform and environment for the benefit of present and future generations;
- (e) providing for land and resource uses and development that are compatible with the other objectives of the Plan;
- (f) providing for continued development within existing urban settlement areas and recognizing existing rural settlements;
- (g) providing for a continuous recreational trail through the Oak Ridges Moraine Area that is accessible to all including persons with disabilities; and

- (h) providing for other public recreational access to the Oak Ridges Moraine Area;
- and,
- (i) any other prescribed objectives.

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