

Township considering its position after MOE approves transformer

By Bill Rea

King Township staff is still reviewing the implications, so it's too soon to know officially what kind of impact Hydro One's transformer station in Holland Marsh is going to have.

Environment Minister Laurel Broten informed the Township in a letter delivered last week that the request for an individual environmental assessment had been turned down, but she tried to cushion the blow.

"As part of this decisions and to ensure that the interests and concerns of the community are protected, I am imposing several conditions on the project," she stated in her six-page letter.

She also attached a five page letter to the utility, outlining the conditions to be met.

Mayor Margaret Black had observed the Township had a number of concerns, and staff is still reviewing the conditions to see how good a job they do of addressing these matters. "Certainly the minister went through in great detail to answer each one," Black admitted, pointing out it took almost a year to make the decision.

"It's not what King wanted, but it is in place," she added. "Reviewing it on my own, it looks like they addressed many of our concerns."

Township CAO Scott Somerville reported Monday that staff is going to spend the next couple of weeks evaluating the conditions Broten set out, with regard to the EA process and what the municipality had been looking for.

"Off hand, things look to be in line," he said, adding they want to make sure they are helpful to King.

Somerville added there's not much question that the station will go ahead. Short of some sort of judicial process, there aren't really any avenues for appeal. "I think the

minister is the appeal," he said.

One of the conditions calls on Hydro One to start discussions with the Township regarding plans to place a distribution station in the area, and the possibility of developing both projects concurrently.

The utility will be required to prepare a storm water management plan prior to applying for a certificate of approval under the Ontario Water Resources Act, and that plan will have to include details on how the site will be drained, impacts to changes in drainage on the nearby wetland and impacts on spring drainage of adjacent farm fields. A copy of that plan will be provided to all parties that had requested the individual environmental assessment.

In addition, Hydro One will be expected to provide the parties with complete copies of their applications (including supporting technical documentation) for certificates of approval under the Environmental Protection Act.

The utility is also required to develop and implement a landscape plan for the property in consultation with the relevant agencies, including the Township, Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority (LSRCA) and Ontario Heritage Trust.

Broten has imposed a number of conditions concerning the comments of various agencies, as well as mitigation measures. They include a call for the utility to implement mitigation measures recommended by the Ministry of Natural Resources, including the use of native species that are appropriate for soil and moisture conditions for plantings before the station starts operating.

There is also a requirement on Hydro One to implement three compensation measures proposed by Ontario Nature. They include tree planting, removal of fill within the existing transmission right-of-way and the erection of a fence where the right-of-way crosses Dufferin Street.

Concerns of LSRCA will have to be addressed too, including those dealing with a buffer width for the nearby wetland complex. The utility will be required to document how these issues have been addressed.

As well, Hydro One will have to mitigate the tunnel effect caused from having distribution lines on both sides of

rural roads.

When it comes to the environmental studies, the utility will be required to document all public and agency comments and correspondence, and include details on how the concerns have been addressed in the planning process. As well, the reasons for selecting the locations of eight distribution circuits running from the station will have to be documented. Both of these conditions will have to be met before construction starts.

There are also three conditions addressing archaeological resources in the area. "In the event that deeply buried archaeological remains are encountered during construction, Hydro One must cease construction immediately and contact the office of the Regulatory and Operations Group at the Ministry of Culture," her letter to the utility stated, adding the Ministry of Culture, as well as the Cemeteries Regulation Unit of the Ministry of Consumer and Business Services must be contacted if human remains are encountered during construction.

The final condition calls upon Hydro One to issue written statements to MOE as each other condition is fulfilled, describing how it was done.

In her letter to the Township, Broten offered assurances that issues and concerns raised by the municipality and others requesting the EA "were extensively reviewed."

"I am satisfied that the issues and concerns have been addressed by the work done to date by Hydro One, or will be addressed in future work that is required to be carried out," she wrote.

There had been concerns about Class 1 farmland in the area, but Broten said potential agricultural impacts were considered in the site selection process. "I am satisfied that the amount of farmland impacted by the project will be minimal," she concluded.

Her letter addressed the old nearby garbage dump, citing a guideline requiring a 30-metre separation, and concluding the Ministry's technical staff had no further issues.

In addition, there had been worries expressed about possible contamination to local wells. Broten stated Hydro One had reported there will be full containment and control facilities, preventing transformer insulating oil from getting into the local environment. She also pointed out the site is several hundred metres from the closest well, so their shouldn't be any negative impacts.

As for the consideration of alternative sites, Broten stated she was satisfied that had been adequately done.

Black stated she would have preferred to see it go in some other municipality, since most of the increased demand for power comes from elsewhere in York.

But she did acknowledge that King residents use facilities located elsewhere in York, such as hospitals.

Area resident Clayton De Vries, who has been involved in this issue in the past, expressed his disappointment with the decision.

"I don't know what will come of that," he remarked. "We're all affected by it, but whether it will serve any purpose for the rest of us to fight it, I just don't know."

He also observed the provincial regulations protecting the oak Ridges Moraine and the Greenbelt don't appear to be of much use to rural people. "They don't help us when we need help," he commented.

Attention residents of King Township

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Mayor Margaret Black will unveil the heritage plaque which will be attached to a monument recognizing the citizens who founded the cemetery 121 years ago this October (October 15, 1886)

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