

- Tina Depko, BURLINGTON POST
- Dec 14, 2010 - 6:00 PM

Province can expect a 'war' over highway



Province can expect a 'war' over highway. Area residents jammed Burlington's Mainway Recreation Centre auditorium for last night's public meeting about the Niagara to Greater Toronto Area transportation corridor. The meeting was in reaction to the provincial government recently releasing a map showing a new more northern route for a proposed highway. *Michael Ivanin - Special to the Post*

A battle cry was sounded by several city and regional council members Monday night, calling on all residents to draw strength in numbers and figuratively storm Queen's Park to show that the Niagara-to-GTA Corridor Highway should not run through Burlington.

The weapons required, according to the politicians, are words – in the form of letters to the local MPPs, ministers and Premier Dalton McGuinty, as well as in delegations to city hall and regional council on the issue.

This was the message Ward 3 Councillor John Taylor, Ward 6 Councillor Blair Lancaster, Mayor Rick Goldring and Halton Regional Chair Gary Carr sent to a massive crowd at a public meeting at Mainway Recreation Centre.

The city and region was unable to provide a headcount to the Post by press time, but some guests at the event said they counted as many as 1,000 people jam-packed into the large auditorium.

While politicians and residents don't always see eye-to-eye on issues, there was an overwhelming sense of consensus that the proposed highway would have a disastrous effect on north Burlington with its rural landscape and Niagara Escarpment features.

"We are with you, we don't want the highway," said Taylor to a large round of applause. "What we have to do is convince the province of Ontario that they don't want the highway and that it is not a good idea. We need to direct all our political energy and citizen activity towards the province of Ontario."

Lancaster gave residents several ideas on how they can make their opposition known.

"We have a whole bunch of ideas for you – first of all, we're hoping that you signed in at the door so we can communicate with you using your e-mail addresses as we want to hear your comments to help form our report back to the province, we want you to sign the petition, we want you to write the important people like premier, the minister of transportation and the leader of the opposition, you can visit the province's website for the project and e-mail them or call their toll-free number and you can select a spokesperson for delegations to city hall and the region," she said. "We want you to stay involved"

Carr reinforced the message that there is power in numbers.

"We'll work together with all of our municipalities and we're going to get the support from our other colleagues in Oakville, Milton and Halton Hills and tonight we're going to work with everyone here so this is a start this isn't the end where we only have one meeting," the regional chair said.

"Please try to get out to your friends, neighbours, brothers and sisters, aunts, uncles, grandmas and grandpas, because the one thing I know is that any level of government, regardless of who is in power, will listen to the people if we remain united."

The public meeting was organized by Taylor after the provincial government released a document to the region this fall showing a different proposed route for a new highway.

The map came from a Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing report sent to the Region of Halton on Oct. 27 regarding the region's Official Plan.

The Burlington stretch depicts a highway route stretching from approximately Tremaine Road near the 407 ETR, northwest to just above Britannia Road before continuing on along an unidentified route through Flamborough, ultimately connecting to Hwy. 403 in Ancaster.

"We are very surprised and concerned about the decisions the provincial government is making," said Lancaster.

Taylor said that previous proposals from the Ministry of Transportation suggested that the route would run more south, closer to No. 1 Side Road. This means the new route would affect residents in areas like Lowville, Cedar Springs and Kilbride. He said that regardless of the route, a highway linking Hwy. 403 and Hwy. 407 is not needed.

The province has told the Post during previous interviews this year that the highway is not a definite, as the environmental assessment has yet to be completed by the Ministry of Transportation.

The latest report to come out of the process is due in January, which will be responded to by the city and region in the spring.

The region will also be responding to the province in the new year about the proposed changes, including the map, to the Official Plan.

While the province has said that the latest map, showing a more northerly route than ever depicted before, is conceptual only, and that the need for the highway – possibly 20 years away – has still not been determined, these statements have not eased public fears about the roadway.

Many residents from the newly-affected areas were at Monday's meeting, taking to the microphone during the open Question and Answer session to express their concerns.

A common theme among the comments was the importance of preserving rural Burlington.

"Carving highways through farms makes farming inoperable, aside from the pollution affecting crops and livestock think rail," said one Lowville resident.

Another popular message was the willingness of residents to work with the city and region.

"Many of us are here tonight and I think you'll find us ready to support you in the fight," said a representative of the Cedar Springs community.

Others were concerned about losing their homes.

"If, heaven forbid, this highway did go through, where would we go? What would happen to us?" said a Cedar Springs resident who saved up for years, finally realizing her dream of building a home in the area.

A presentation was also made at the event by Pete Zuzek, a spokesperson for Citizens Opposed to the Paving the Escarpment (COPE), who outlined a number of problems with the proposed highway, such as overly-ambitious population and job creation figures, the emphasis on road-building over alternative transportation like rail and the poorly planned route.

"The corridor would destroy a section of the Niagara Escarpment, a world biosphere reserve" he said. "COPE is all about preserving the natural escarpment and it is outrageous in this era to see people wanting to put pavement on the escarpment."

Conservative MPPs Ted Chudleigh for Halton and Joyce Savoline for Burlington used the advantage of the Liberal-proposed project and lack of any Liberal Queen's Park representatives at the meeting to push the message that they are against the highway and will support the people of Burlington in the fight.