

DAILY COMMERCIAL NEWS

AND CONSTRUCTION RECORD

February 25, 2009

Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario

RCCAO report calls for elimination of environmental assessment red tape

VINCE VERSACE

staff writer

Red tape delaying shovels from breaking ground on projects needs to be cut now more than ever before, the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario (RCCAO) says.

“There has to be a political will for streamlining the EA (environmental assessment) process and I think there is a real appetite to make it happen,” says Andy Manahan, executive director of RCCAO. “Unless red tape is eliminated, there will be delays for projects to come on stream.”

The RCCAO is not saying that environmental concerns should be minimized, but its recent white paper, *Environmental Assessment Reform: A Tool for Economic Recovery*, says that time-consuming and, at times, repetitive legislation is inefficient and could hamper the quick roll-out of economic stimulus projects.

“There could be better integration of land-use and environmental planning, for instance,” says Manahan. “Land-use planning (legislation) has come a long way since it was first implemented.”

Clarifying and improving the harmonization between land-use planning and EA processes will help avoid “duelling processes,” says the RCCAO report created by the MMM Group.

An integration of the two processes could include improving the way land-use planning considers alternatives, but then allows the land-use planning process to fulfill EA requirements. Manahan notes there are times when the land-use planning has already addressed environmental concerns and projects “shouldn’t have to go back to the beginning again” through an EA process.

The RCCAO white paper urges that Ontario immediately unveil a Declaration Order to simplify EA requirements, as it already has done for transit projects. The required consideration of

“alternatives solutions” for a project would be removed, especially for those that are part of economic stimulus packages.

“It would shorten the process for completing environmental assessments, and it would reduce the scope of matters that would be exposed...potentially saving even further time,” states the report.

Ontario could also revise the Class EA process with a view to eliminating requests for formal government reviews (known as Part II Order Requests) that are frivolous, RCCAO says.

“There are certainly legitimate concerns raised on many projects, but there must be some limits on blatant abuse and delay tactics where legitimate processes are ignored,” adds Manahan.

The RCCAO report calls for improved co-operation between Queen’s Park and Ottawa concerning EA processes, which seems to be underway already through recent federal government decisions to reduce the reassessment of provincial projects which have satisfied provincial EA requirements.

John Baird, Canada’s infrastructure minister, has stated that changes to both the Navigable Waters and Fisheries acts, and a significant reduction in required federal EA requirements, are part of Ottawa’s plan to drive infrastructure spending and projects.

“By working together, all levels of government can develop a better, more targeted and streamlined EA process,” the report concludes. “Developing this process with input from industry will ensure that requirements which are ineffective and inefficient are removed, and requirements are targeted to ensure EA processes fulfill their intended function.”