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Municipal environmental assessment process criticized - **SPEED UP GREEN REVIEWS**

By Sarah Ratchford

The municipal environmental assessment process is slowing the completion of local infrastructure projects, according to the **Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario**.

A [report](#) commissioned by the alliance found that it takes more than 26 months to go through the municipal environmental assessment compared to 19 months when a similar report was published in 2010. As well, the report estimated that the costs of background studies and reports have more than doubled over the past four years.

Andy Manahan, executive director of RCCAO, says the time taken for the assessment process affects completion of roads, bridges, water, sewer and other civil infrastructure projects. He questions the need for some components required by the environmental assessment process, as some of the same steps are already covered under the [provincial] *Planning Act*.

“The *Planning Act* already requires a lot of environmental oversight,” he told *NRU*. “If that’s already been done in a comprehensive way, it’s a duplication of effort.” “What we’re hearing is just that the complexity of going through the environmental assessment process requires of a lot of reporting various studies,” he says, recommending more attention be paid to streamlining the process to remove what he and others contend are unnecessary consultant and other studies.

“It’s just those sorts of practical things; recognizing that by streamlining, improvements can be made.”

Ontario Home Builders’ Association CEO **Joe Vaccaro** also recommends streamlining of environmental assessments to promote productivity.

“The process is lengthy, and it’s definitely grown in length,” he tells *NRU*. “Time is money, and it’s very difficult to contain costs and to hold estimates for construction work when a process you believe will be finished in a year will actually be finished within a couple of years.”

“The current process is much too lengthy, much too cumbersome, and much too expensive.”

Vaccaro contends that the time required to complete an environmental assessment can hinder development, given that master plans for communities typically require additional roads and services. Even when a draft plan is approved, he says an environmental assessment is still required before the start of construction.

“There’s no point in approving a road, only to have it change to another process,” he says public meetings, information and research should be shared in order to save time.

Among the report’s key recommendations:

- fast-track schedule B and C Municipal Class projects in the same way as many transit project EAs
- reduce the scope and complexity of EA reports and background studies
- require municipalities to combine Environmental Assessment Act and Planning Act requirements in joint, not separate, public consultations where possible
- post completed EA reports on the Ministry of Environment website to ensure greater transparency
- limit the right to request a more detailed EA review through a so-called ‘bump up’ provision of legislation

The report comes as RCCAO, which represents management and labour groups in the construction industry, the **Ontario Home Builders’ Association**, and the **Ministry of the Environment** are working to streamline environmental processes outlined in the *Planning Act*. Vaccaro and Manahan say such streamlining would avoid redundancy by ensuring the same consultation process is not carried out twice for the same site, thereby shortening the total time taken for project approval.

Vaccaro says that so far, discussions with the Ministry of the Environment on streamlining the process have been going well, adding that there’s “a lot of goodwill” around the idea.

Environment ministry spokesperson **Kate Jordan** says the ministry is working with municipal stakeholders to “improve the effectiveness and efficient delivery of environmental approvals for municipal projects.” She adds that the ministry supports improvements to the municipal class environmental assessment process and is reviewing the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario’s report.