

# DAILY COMMERCIAL NEWS

## AND CONSTRUCTION RECORD

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Municipal Engineers Association seeks input on streamlining environmental assessments

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The Municipal Engineers Association (MEA) would like construction industry input on how to best integrate the Municipal Class Environmental Assessment (MCEA) with the planning process.

“The integration of the MCEA with the Planning Act is complicated, as is streamlining the process so it works better,” explained Paul Knowles, chair of the MEA EA monitoring committee and chief administrative officer of Carleton Place.

The MEA recently distributed a survey to stakeholders involved in building and planning asking for feedback to help guide proposed MCEA amendments to be sent to the Ministry of the Environment (MOE) by Oct. 1. Combining environmental assessment and land-use planning requirements into a single process has been considered by many as the best streamlined way to meet environmental and planning act regulations effectively. A streamlined integrated process also better recognizes the connections among economic, environmental and social factors incorporated in planning and is more cost effective.

A Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario (RCCAO) report released in March concluded that Ontario’s MCEA system adds \$232 million in extra project costs and holds back 10,000 jobs through delays. The association is encouraged by the MEA outreach survey.

“We have said that the integration of the land use and environment assessment approvals process is most important,” said Andy Manahan, executive director of RCCAO. “Such integration would benefit not only industry but also the public because when the processes are combined, it is more straightforward and effective.”

The RCCAO report: “Ontario’s Municipal Class Environmental Class Assessments Worth the Time and Money?” looked at 99 construction projects valued at \$1.1 billion. These projects included road extensions and widening, bridge replacements and alterations or expansions of sewer and water infrastructure.

Based on an evaluation of these 99 projects, Ontario municipalities typically encounter projects delays of 19 months or more compared with other Canadian municipalities, concluded the report. Ontario is the lone Canadian jurisdiction that has MCEAs for even simple projects like intersection improvements, road widening and bridge replacements.

Knowles noted that proposed amendments to the MOE are also an opportunity to update MCEA schedule definitions based on input received. For example, building a roadside park is considered a Schedule B activity when really it should be under Schedule A under the MCEA, he said.

“Municipalities build other parks all the time and there is no EA process,” said Knowles. “It seems odd if the park is going to be a roadside park that it will be more onerous to build than building a whole major downtown park.”

Any amendments integration or change will require an education strategy, including a series of web based

training modules, added Knowles.

“A very important component of it (amendments) will be training afterwards for all the practitioners that use the EA,” said Knowles. “We need to give them an opportunity to understand how it works and how it will benefit them.”

For a copy of the MEA survey contact Kelly Roberts of Delcan at 1-613-738-4160 ext 228.