



NEW HOMES & CONDOS

So, where does the Ontario Municipal Board fit in?



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Pick up just about any newspaper across Ontario and you'll likely see a headline with "OMB" in it. But what exactly is the OMB, fully known as the Ontario Municipal Board?

And what is its role in the public planning process and in shaping new communities? The OMB is a quasi-judicial body that settles local development and urban planning disputes based on provincial policy, municipal official plans and planning law.

The OMB has a long history in Ontario and, as you can imagine, any type of body that makes decisions on controversial development issues can often be a target for resentment.

But as challenging as it can

be, it is the legislative and public role of the OMB, to ultimately make decisions on complex and typically controversial issues impacting communities across Ontario.

Local planning issues can be contentious, especially in a region growing as fast as the GTA as some people are resistant to change. This ultimately leads to planning becoming very political with various groups trying to persuade local councilors to vote one way or another on a particular development or property dispute.

Unfortunately, a political vote based on short-term thinking doesn't necessarily lead to the best longer-term planning outcomes. This is where the OMB was legislated to reside.

In our current planning system, an appeal to a non-political, unbiased decision-maker

is essential to ensure that any municipality or community, along with the landowner has an opportunity to present their case and have it judged based on evidence and sound planning principles. Essentially the OMB is an impartial tribunal that is independent from local political pressures.

As you can imagine some politicians don't like not having ultimate control over everything that happens in their community and have suggested



The reality is that, in the vast majority of cases the OMB hears evidence that could not be properly presented in a municipal council situation and the OMB makes good planning decisions with little to no fanfare.

that the OMB isn't needed. Furthermore, the media is more likely to publicize the most controversial OMB cases versus the sometimes 'boring decisions' because controversy sells.

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tion and the OMB makes good planning decisions with little to no fanfare.

However, every now and then there are high profile cases when a new project is proposed in a neighbourhood that is opposed by some for NIMBY (not in my backyard) reasons. The local politician may side with a few vocal critics to ensure that they receive the votes they need to get re-elected and then conveniently blames the OMB when the project receives the approval it should have received in the first place.

This is a story the media loves to play up, unfortunately pointing to the OMB as the problem rather than the councillor who ignored the planning facts that support the ultimate decision.

Urban planning and new development certainly can be controversial but in a growing region that tens of thousands of people are moving into every year we need to plan for the future. This requires long-term thinking, coordination between municipal and provincial plans and, most importantly, decision making that is not based on the political vote. The OMB is not without controversy, but that is ultimately what its role is — to make those difficult decisions that local politics can't or won't make and to ensure those decisions are made based on facts and evidence-based planning principles. These decisions help to ensure that we continue to build and sustain affordable and livable communities in which to live, work and play, across Ontario.

— Michael Collins-Williams is a Registered Professional Planner and is the Director of Policy at the Ontario Home Builders' Association.

Find the right contractor for your dream home addition



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After considering your various options for months, you have finally come to the conclusion that building a new home addition is the wisest choice, given your budget and your needs.

But how do you go about beginning the process of finding a contractor that you can trust and rely on? EiEiHome spoke to Daniel of Integrity Contracting to find out.

"First of all, ask around," says Daniel. "Get references. Perhaps a neighbour recently got a kitchen extension put in," he added. It's always best when you get to examine the quality of the work firsthand.

Secondly, he says, "It is always a wise idea to consult with a few different contractors." House additions are not a small job or investment; you will want to make sure that you find someone who can

deliver top-quality work.

Here are a few tips to determine if a contractor is honest, ethical and efficient:

- Find out if they are

licensed to operate in your region, and if they are bonded and insured. If any accidents happen during the construction, you should not be held liable for the costs involved.

- Ask about a mechanic's lien. Sometimes, house additions are completed by your main contractor, who may subcontract various parts of the job. Under the mechanic's lien law in some provinces, if you pay your contractor but, for example, they do not pay the electrician, that electrician may place a lien on your home. This renders you liable for the cost of their work.

- Can the contractor provide you with examples of similar projects or completed additions? Take advantage of the opportunity to talk to their other clients.

- Find out how many other projects the contractor will be working on simultaneously in

addition to yours. Home additions can be rather disruptive to your living situation, so you'll want it completed in a reasonable timeframe.

- Ask for a deadline or a fixed start and end date. Be wary if a contractor gives you vague, non-committal answers.

- Finally, be sure to obtain an itemized list of expected costs, and check how much downpayment is required. If your contractor has a steady work and cash flow, you should not be expected to foot large costs upfront.

If you keep these tips in mind, you will be well on your way to finding a contractor you can rely on to and is capable of building high quality home additions. Integrity Contracting is built on accountability to their clients and quality work; they are also bonded and insured.

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