

# Communication Update

**To:** Mayor and Members of City Council

**Date:** May 20, 2026

**Subject/Report No.:** Comments on ERO 019-7891 – Proposed Changes to the Municipal Class Environmental Assessment Process (ENG2601)

**Ward(s) Affected:** City Wide

**Submitted By:** Brian Hollingworth  
Director  
Engineering Services  
Public Works

**Signature:**



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The purpose of this Communication Update is to advise Council.

## Summary

This Communication Update provides Council with an update on the Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks' (Ministry) ERO 019-7891. On December 5, 2025, the Ministry released an updated proposal for ERO 019-7891, regarding changes to the Municipal Class Environmental Assessment process. Staff have submitted comments (Appendix "A" to Communication Update 2601) on February 3, 2026, in accordance with the comment period deadline.

## Background

On February 16, 2024, the Ministry proposed a new regulation through ERO-019-7891 posting with the intent to modernize how municipalities plan for infrastructure by revoking the Municipal Class Environmental Assessment and creating a new Environmental Assessment regulation called the Municipal Project Assessment Process.

In response to the posting, the City's Environmental Assessment Staff Working Group submitted feedback in the form of a letter comprised of input gathered from subject matter

experts across the organization. The comments and an associated staff report were presented through [Report PED24098/ PW24029](#) at the General Issues Committee meeting on September 4th, 2024. The endorsed comments are included as part of Appendix “A” of this report.

On December 5, 2025, the Ministry released an updated version of the proposal which was open for comments until February 3, 2026.

## Details

In the updated proposal, the intent to replace the Municipal Class Environmental Assessment process with the Municipal Project Assessment Process has been maintained with some changes to its implementation.

Some of the key changes include:

- a new archaeological assessment process;
- a new list of projects subject to the proposed archaeological assessment process;
- additional clarifications for the Municipal Project Assessment Process project list; and;
- additional steps tied to environmental impact assessment and project notifications for the Municipal Project Assessment Process.

The Environmental Assessment Staff Working Group remains supportive of the efforts to modernize the Municipal Class Environmental Assessment process; however, primary feedback with the process remains unaddressed and new concerns have arisen with the updated proposal. Detailed further in Appendix “A” to Communication Update ENG2601, some key focal points of concerns are:

- While a new archaeological assessment process has been introduced for many projects identified as exempt from the MPAP process, there are guidance gaps to ensure consistent and transparent planning takes place.
- The proposed archaeological assessment process significantly alters the current sequence that municipalities follow when moving projects from planning to detailed design.
- The new archaeological assessment process aids in guiding planning work tied to archaeology. Some project considerations lack provincial guidance but still need to be included. For example, property impacts, cultural heritage, ecology, safety, and public engagement in alignment with City requirements. Additionally, the Ministry confirmed through their webinar on January 23, 2026, that requests made for the Minister’s Order process (currently the Section 16 Order process) will be applicable to topics outside of archaeology.

- Gaps remain with application of the proposed archaeological assessment process between private and public proponents. Public proponents are subject to all projects identified in the project list whereas private proponents are only subject to some. Inconsistent approaches are a concern as the City of Hamilton has instances where the private proponents have been appropriately responsible for carrying out projects (e.g. Gordon Dean Ave. Phases 3 and 4), that the City eventually owns.

Staff developed the response to the Ministry's posting, inclusive of the comments above, through consultation with internal stakeholders across the following departments: Healthy and Safe Communities; Planning and Economic Development; and Public Works. In addition to internal stakeholders, the Environmental Assessment Staff Working Group also consulted the Municipal Engineers Association to ensure alignment with other industry experts (other municipalities in Ontario).

## Next Steps

Staff has requested a meeting from the Ministry to discuss the impending MPAP and other proposed changes and will continue following the current process for infrastructure planning until a change is formally enacted. No timelines have been provided by the Ministry as to when the Minister's decision can be expected or if additional proposals are anticipated. Once more information becomes available and should there be impacts (schedule, budgetary and/or scope) to any of the projects, additional communications will be provided.

If you have any questions regarding this communication, please contact Brian Hollingworth, Director Engineering Services at (905) 546-2424 ext. 2953 or by email at [Brian.Hollingworth@hamilton.ca](mailto:Brian.Hollingworth@hamilton.ca).

## Appendices and Schedules Attached

Appendix "A" – 2026 Letter to the Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks



Hamilton

February 3, 2026

EA Modernization Team  
Environmental Assessment Modernization Branch  
Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks  
135 St Clair Ave West, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Toronto, ON M4V 1P5

**Re: MECP's Proposed Changes to the MCEA Process**

Dear EA Modernization Team,

The City of Hamilton's Environmental Assessment Working Group (EAWG) is pleased to provide input on the province's commitment to modernize the Municipal Class Environmental Assessment Process (MCEA), specifically on the updated [ERO-019-7891](#) posting.

For the original ERO-019-7891 posting, the City of Hamilton, through its EAWG, submitted comments on March 15, 2024, and subsequently resubmitted Council-endorsed comments on September 26, 2024 (see **Attachment A**). Through the review of the updated ERO-019-7891 posting, we conclude that the City's original comments have not been addressed. Notwithstanding, EAWG is providing comments specific to the updated posting below.

Hamilton's EAWG is supportive of the proposal to modernize the MCEA process through the development of a regulation and implementation of additional technical requirements; however, some concerns remain with the updated proposal for the proposed Municipal Project Assessment Process (MPAP) Regulation and the associated archaeological assessment process.

Detailed feedback to the updated ERO posting is broken down into four (4) components reflective of the posting headings:

1. Introduction of an Archaeological Assessment Process
2. Projects Proposed to be Subject to the Archaeological Assessment Process
3. Proposed MPAP Regulation Project List
4. Proposed Changes to the Previously Proposed MPAP Regulation

## 1. Introduction of an Archaeological Assessment Process

**The updated provision related to archaeology is supported; however, there are additional project process gaps that remain.** For high-impact projects, such as new roads and road widenings, there are other components that would benefit from structure and direction, such as ecology, and built heritage, etc. Only including requirements for one element of good planning may pose a challenge for consistency, public transparency, and Minister’s Orders relating to Section 17.31(7).

Consideration should also be given to the following:

- a. **Renaming “archaeological assessment”.** The term “archaeological assessment” is used widely by practitioners for works that are not exclusively used in the environmental assessment process. Generally, the term “archaeological assessments” is applied to a range of projects within and outside the EA process which follow a different set of requirements than those identified through this proposal and potentially have scope that extends far beyond the scope of this proposal (i.e. Stages 1 through 4).
- b. **Providing clarification** regarding the **legislation** that this process will be integrated with.
- c. **Providing clarification regarding engagement requirements** with Indigenous Nations, such as means of notifying, content of notifications, and any follow up requirements. Forms, templates, and other supports from the province would be appreciated.
- d. **Providing Notice to Indigenous Nations in advance of undertaking Stage 1 Archaeology**, possibly as part of ongoing engagement and relationship building efforts in municipal settings. Early notification and involvement may reduce issues that arise at the review stage if the work is already complete prior to Indigenous involvement. In the webinar on January 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2026, it was noted that early engagement was recommended, but not a requirement. For consistent application, clear direction on requirements should be provided by the province.
- e. **Providing clarification on the timing of the formal submission of the Stage 1 report to the Ministry** – whether that takes place during the process outlined or following the completion of the process. This should also be reviewed in the context of whether the work completed is Stage 1, Stage 2, or both.
- f. **Providing flexibility for projects with archaeological potential where only Stage 1 is typically completed as part of current Class EA processes** - Stage 2 is typically not practicable until detailed design (when project impacts become fully known). If Stage 2 must be completed as part of the MPAP process, additional work will be required at detailed design, thereby extending scope, schedule and budget. Suggested note: “Archaeology Stage 2 may be postponed until detailed design where appropriate”. In the webinar on January 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2026, it was noted that the province’s view was that the process could overlap with detailed design; however, this provides challenges with municipalities needing to restructure current workflows in the event that a concern is raised by a Nation and the Minister issues an Order that impacts the design work already completed.

- g. **Providing transition provisions for ongoing projects**, where Archaeology Stage 1 was already completed during the MCEA process, and Stage 2 was identified for detailed design. It is unclear if the current expectation is that the Stage 2 work is now subject to the proposed process in ERO-019-7891.
- h. **Providing detailed Terms of Reference and requirements** for the newly proposed "summary report, containing Archaeology Reports and engagement with Indigenous Treaty Nations.
- i. **Providing clarification on waiting periods for summary reports** if no need for changes to the report have been identified.
- j. **Providing clarification regarding the following:**
  - o The updated proposal notes that "...the minister would have the ability to intervene by making an order under Section 17.31 of the Act..." and specifically notes Section 17.31 (7) which covers any aspects that "...may prevent, mitigate or remedy adverse impacts on the existing Aboriginal and Treaty rights..." This section of the Act is broad in nature; it does not focus exclusively on archaeology. This creates a potential challenge if a project is only subject to the proposed archaeological assessment process but receives feedback on topics outside of archaeology that a proponent does not have technical information in support of and/or may have scheduled to complete in a future project phase (e.g. detailed design). If a project, through screening, only needs to comply with the archaeology assessment process, then the Minister's order and associated issues should only relate to archaeology. If there is a risk that the Minister's order and associated issues can extend beyond archaeology, then the proposed process could have significant gaps that would be detrimental to the Proponent.
  - o In the webinar on January 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2026, it was confirmed that the Minister could issue an Order on matters outside of archaeology and it is the expectation that municipalities would have completed all other technical work outside of archaeology regardless. This poses a challenge due to unclear and undefined requirements; if other technical works are still required it should be clearly stated as an expectation of projects and a specific process with guidelines should still be maintained.

## **2. Projects Proposed to be Subject to the Archaeological Assessment Process**

- a. It is advised that the Project List be reviewed for consistency. Several of the projects identified as "not applicable" to the private sector are projects that may be carried out by the private sector (albeit not frequently). This includes, but is not limited to, #5, #8, #10, #12, #14, and #16. Consideration should be given to excluding projects that are typically subject to Planning Act requirements and including them if they fall outside of it.
- b. The Project List needs to better acknowledge cultural project context i.e. if a planned project is or on a property with archaeological potential, it is recommended that archaeology screening be completed regardless of length of impacted area. Consideration should also be given to other forms of environmentally sensitive areas.

### **3. Proposed MPAP Regulation Project List**

- a. The update to include the private sector being subject to the proposed process is supported. Consistent and predictable application is beneficial to proponents, stakeholders, and community members.

### **4. Proposed Additional Changes to MPAP Regulation**

- a. The updates to the proposed process to publicly release completed technical documents in advance of engagement requirements adds complexity to the process. It is better to develop technical documents as the project progresses so that any new information gleaned from the engagement process can be incorporated as the work is completed. Otherwise, proponents may be subject to significantly more work and expenditures due to having to revisit completed documents after receiving feedback. This approach may also limit public, stakeholder, and Indigenous feedback from being properly incorporated. With the proposed format, feedback becomes more subjective as it is not able to be simply factored in as a project develops, reducing transparency and trust-building opportunities.
- b. The updated proposal states that upon consulting with Indigenous Nations, "where any comment raises a concern, a written response must be provided at least 30 days prior to publishing the final report". Additional clarifications should be made regarding what constitutes a "concern". A broad definition, or lack of definition, may lead to significant project delays. This timing should also be considered in relation to the 120-day, or maximum 150-day process. Concerns or comments raised near the end of the period will extend the project beyond the mandatory timelines imposed through the proposed process.
- c. In the webinar on January 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2026, it was confirmed that Master Plans would not be included in the proposed MPAP regulation. The province noted that master planning activities would be encouraged but would not be required and guidance would not be provided. Accordingly, municipalities would then have to create their own process or continue to follow the last edition of the MCEA guidance document, understanding that there would be no supported provincial process. It would be beneficial to include some master plan guidance in the proposed regulation as consistent planning tools should remain available.

The above comments should be reviewed in tandem with **Attachment A** as they have not been addressed to date. We would also like to request a meeting to discuss how EA Reform will address our concerns. We look forward to future communications and opportunities to provide input.

Thank you,

Environmental Assessment Working Group (Co-Chairs)

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March 15, 2024

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**Re: MECP's Proposed Changes to the MCEA Process**

Dear EA Modernization Team,

**Introduction**

The City of Hamilton's Environmental Assessment Working Group (EAWG) is pleased to provide input on the Province's commitment to modernize the Municipal Class Environmental Assessment Process (MCEA), specifically ERO-019-7891. These comments have been reviewed by subject matter experts across the City of Hamilton.

EAWG is supportive of the proposal to change the MCEA process to a regulation, but there are concerns with the current proposed Municipal Project Assessment Process (MPAP) Regulation.

Detailed feedback to the ERO is broken down into five (5) components:

1. Proposed MPAP Regulation
2. Proposed MPAP Regulation Project List
3. Proposed MCEA Revocation
4. Proposed Transition Provisions
5. Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks (MECP) Proposed Municipal Project Assessment (Feb.28) Webinar Comments.

**1. Proposed MPAP Regulation**

- There is support for certain processes of the proposed MPAP such as streamlining certain tasks, for example considerations for the removal of "Do Nothing" option when identifying the needs and justification for projects, as well as the certainty of time of feedback to be received from the MECP.
- During previous consultations on MCEA process updates and the development of the proposed MPAP regulation, the City of Hamilton and other

municipalities requested more guidance on various topics (e.g., Indigenous engagement), which is missing in the proposed MPAP regulation. Additionally, the proposed MPAP Regulation timeline does not appear to consider that Indigenous Nations may not work on the same timelines that MECP proposed for the proposed MPAP Regulation (Nations may have their own internal review timelines) and that they may not have the resources that would be needed to complete the review.

- It is misleading to state that the proposed MPAP regulation can be completed within a 6 - month window. This does not align with relevant field assessments that require varying timing windows (e.g., bat surveys and amphibian surveys) or assessments that take longer than 6 months to complete (e.g., Archaeology Assessment). Thus, the proposed MPAP Regulation will not likely be less onerous, less costly or take less time than the existing MCEA process for the listed projects.
- The proposed MPAP Regulation does not appear to account for the full scope of work necessary to complete a high quality transparent planning process, including long term cumulative impacts (e.g., climate change). Please confirm that MECP would require the Municipality to complete all work required prior to triggering the proposed MPAP.
- It is a concern that the 120-day timeline will make meaningful consultation with stakeholders challenging. It is currently interpreted that the entirety of the technical and pre-consultation work, including the development and consideration of alternative solutions as well as alternative design concepts must precede the issuance of the Notice of Commencement. As a result, consultation essentially will occur after the outcome for the project has been fully determined, and opportunities for the public to provide input will be superficial.
- It is noted that the 30-day timeout period is unlikely to be sufficient to address any major concerns or issues raised in the formal consultation period. MECP should also provide more rigid timelines on agency reviews (e.g. Ministry of Citizenship and Multiculturalism) in order to streamline the process and to minimize or eliminate approval delays.
- To issue a Notice of Completion, the study would require Council approval via a report to Council that in a larger municipality takes up to 3 months, which does not fit within the 6-month timeline set by the Province.
- Will the proposed MPAP Regulation address the requirements of other regulations that are currently required under the existing MCEA process such as Source Water Protection?
  - The proposed MPAP Regulation does not appear to address the requirements related to Source Protection Planning, nor does it consider source protection policies and assessments of drinking water threats. It is important to recognize and uphold the existing obligations for source protection technical work, input from the Source

Protection Authority, and source protection technical reviews during a MPAP study. These requirements should be duly acknowledged and maintained.

- The proposed MPAP regulation does not address the impacts to cultural heritage resources typically impacted by infrastructure projects. Additional guidance on this is requested.

## **2. Proposed MPAP Regulation Project List**

- It is unclear where Master Plans fall into the proposed MPAP framework (and their associated approaches or 'modified' approaches) which currently exist in the MCEA process.
- It is strongly advised that new road construction and widening of roadways should be included in the proposed MPAP Regulation, due to the cumulative impacts of such projects and to ensure municipalities can protect land required for future roads and road widenings.
- Depending on a private development's project and its location, there are other legislative, regulatory and/or municipal requirements outside of the EA Act. For example, an Official Plan carries requirements for the MCEA to establish private services within a permanent residential area (e.g., trailer parks). It should be clarified within the proposed MPAP Regulation if the municipal policies take precedence over provisions of the EA modernization approach.
- Certain project descriptions and the Proposed Part II.4 Project List include elements that are confusing. For example, it is not clear if a new pumping station with chlorination and UV (treatment within a small well system) within an existing system would be considered a water treatment facility and require an EA study. At present, this initiative falls under Schedule B. A clearer delineation of project types and scenarios would be helpful. Additionally, it is essential to acknowledge the distinction between small groundwater systems and large surface water systems.
- There is support for the Municipal Engineers Associations' (MEA) comments on the proposed MPAP Regulation, particularly the Project List section.

## **3. Proposed MCEA Revocation**

- There is a need for municipalities to protect future road allowances. Notwithstanding provisions included in an Official Plan or a strategic Master Plan, it will be difficult to defend a municipal interest through a Planning Act application if a development is submitted as a Site Plan and the municipality is unable to define the precise land requirements for a new or widened road (currently defined through a Schedule B or C approved Class EA).
- Studies that are currently completed outside of the Planning Act process and subjected to MCEA's Schedule B and C requirements (e.g. increased capacity on a new pumping station, new stormwater outfalls, communal wells), are defined through the EA process and defensible through a regulatory appeal

process (e.g. OLT, Minister's Order Request). Removing the requirements to adequately define municipal infrastructure needs and constraints, through a transparent and engaging process, will leave maintenance and expansion of public infrastructures at risk.

- During previous consultations on MCEA process updates and the development of the proposed MPAP regulation, municipalities requested more guidance on various topics (e.g., Indigenous engagement). Road related projects often garner Indigenous interests. The proposed exclusion of road projects from the proposed MPAP Regulation appears to contradict the intent of Indigenous Reconciliation including United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). It also does not support municipalities that will continue to experience challenges with Indigenous engagement. While the above specifies road projects, there may be other project types that have been excluded from the proposed MPAP Project List where UNDRIP and Indigenous Reconciliation concerns would also apply.
- The revocation is contrary to the municipal, provincial, federal, and global objectives to combat climate change.
- The exclusion of roadway projects from the proposed regulation is a significant concern and it is not supported. These are projects that are often complex and generate public, Indigenous, and stakeholder interest. Without the MCEA process (or a provincial body oversight), and even with the Planning Act, there will be no provincial requirements for proponents to engage with the public, Indigenous Nations, and stakeholders the same way. It is understood that the proposal intends to enable completion of road projects on time and budget, however, the complete exclusion of roads from the proposed MPAP Regulation will lead to inconsistent and/or inadequate assessments of important considerations such as natural heritage, archaeology, cultural heritage, stormwater, etc... at the expense of the "time is money" principle. While there is nothing stopping proponents and private developers from undertaking good planning and having the MEA maintain a guidance document, the lack of framework and enforcement as provided by the proposed MPAP Regulation reduces good planning from a "requirement" to "discretionary and ad-hoc" as decided by a proponent and/or private developer. This will lead to degradation of the process and outcomes including inconsistencies in how municipalities plan for infrastructure.
- The past 30-years of the MCEA's process experience has resulted in the protection of the environment including natural and cultural heritage resources. The introduction of new instruments, through the proposed MPAP Regulation, should ensure the protection measures mentioned above are intact.
- With many municipalities who may have different requirements and expectations for various aspects of project planning, the proposed MPAP Regulation will be required to provide additional guidance in order to:

- Ensure consistency in assignments for consultants across municipalities, it's important to standardize requirements. Varying requirements among municipalities can make it difficult for consultants to understand specific needs, hindering efficiency.
  - Provide consistency and transparency for meaningful engagement with the public and stakeholders.
  - Ensure that Indigenous Nations can meaningfully participate as they work with many municipalities who would each have different requirements and expectations.
- There are also concerns about the exclusion of Master Plans for all municipal infrastructure types. Master Plans are a key tool for all infrastructure planning projects. It is highly recommended that Master Planning provisions be included, particularly Approach 1 and Approach 2 of the current MCEA process. While the City of Hamilton typically only uses Approach 1, it is recognized that there may be value in maintaining Approach 2. It is not anticipated that Approach 3 would ever be feasible for the size and complexity of Master Plans completed by large municipalities such as ours.
  - The proposed regulation is holding a municipality to a higher standard for completing an activity than a private development. Private development is for profit and much more likely to circumvent processes or cut corners than a municipality that is typically more devoted to the overall protection and benefit of the local area/municipality.
  - The benefits of not having EA appeals (Section 16) after an EA project is completed and filed, does not outweigh the potential legal actions taken against proponents during the Ontario Land Tribunal (OLT) process. The MCEA process serves as a rationale and documentation for decisions made on why certain standards and guidelines are required.
  - Furthermore, certain environmental, social, or economic triggers/ conditions should require a developer to complete an EA. For example, whenever a private developer is proposing a realignment of a planned arterial road, they should be required to provide a justification for change and a comparison between impacts from the Master Plan's approved arterial road alignment and the new alignment. The current Planning Act process does not require a comparison. Instead, the onus would fall on the municipality to request such a comparison on a case-by-case basis, which is challenged through a regulatory appeal process through the OLT. The existing MCEA process is a well proven and effective tool for that. The proposed regulation should apply to both private and public proponents.

#### 4. **Proposed Transition Provisions**

- It is requested that as much notice as possible be given so that municipalities can develop a new process in-lieu of the proposed MPAP regulation. For

example, it may take a minimum of 12 months for a new process to be developed and approved by Council in municipalities.

- For Master Plans that have been completed and have used Approach 1 and Approach 2, the expectation is that additional work will be completed for projects identified through the Master Plans. In the event that the proposed MPAP regulation is approved, there are concerns about gaps of assessment work needed should developers be responsible for completing the remaining assessment work (Phase 3 and 4 of the existing MCEA process). The roles and responsibilities of the proponents and developers for these projects (Phase 3 and 4) should be clearly defined.
- There is support for transition provisions that would allow for:
  - Projects that are not on the MPAP Project List to complete the MCEA process or easily withdraw from the process by providing notice.
  - Projects that are on the MPAP Project List to be able to complete the EA Act requirements either under the existing MCEA process or the proposed MPAP Regulation.
  - Inclusion of transition timelines e.g. 6 -12-month window to complete ongoing MCEA projects before the new regulation is in place.

#### **5. Proposed Municipal Project Assessment Process (MECP) Feb 28 @ 2pm Webinar**

- MECP had noted that larger municipalities can and have been utilizing Master Plans to fulfil inventory assessments (i.e., Approach 3). City of Hamilton does not use this approach for Master Plans. Instead, Approach 1 and occasionally Approach 2 are used, but never Approach 3 (which includes detailed inventory assessments) due to the size, complexity, and long timelines of implementation of Master Plans. It is not anticipated that Approach 3 would ever be feasible for the size and complexity of Master Plans completed by large municipalities such as ours.
- It was disappointing that MECP indicated that it is not responsible for providing other mechanisms that would compensate for the removal of the existing MCEA process e.g., guidance documents or other legislation. Administrative impacts that have not been anticipated will need to be addressed, which the Province should be responsible for.

#### **Final Comments**

The above comments have been prepared by City of Hamilton Staff but have not yet been reviewed by the City of Hamilton Council due to the short commenting window set by the MECP. Due to the significance of the proposed changes, it is Staff's intent to seek Council review and provide the MECP with any additional comments. Staff expect to finalize comments in late Spring 2024.

Thank you,

City of Hamilton Environmental Assessment Working Group (Co-Chairs)

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