

November 26, 2020

File: AA-056-20

Via e-mail

Honourable Rod Phillips
Minister of Finance

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Honourable Jeff Yurek
Minister of Environment, Conservation and Parks

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Honourable John Yakabuski
Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry

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Honourable Steve Clark
Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing

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RE: Bill 229: Protect, Support and Recover from COVID-19 Act (Budget Measures Act) – Schedule 6 – Conservation Authorities Act.

Dear Minister Phillips, Minister Yurek, Minister Yakabuski, and Minister Clark:

I am writing to you on behalf of the Board of Directors of the Cataraqi Region Conservation Authority (Cataraqi Conservation) in response to the proposed amendments to the Conservation Authorities Act (CA Act), contained in Schedule 6, Bill 229.

Ontario's Conservation Authorities are well positioned to be stewards of the environment crossing municipal boundaries through the watershed-based model, which is ideal to support science-based decision making, collaborative strategies, and protect people and property and conserve the natural environment. As environmental professionals, Conservation Authorities provide a vital role in land use planning and permitting to fulfill the provincial mandate of conserving natural systems, and ensure communities at risk from flooding and other climate change impacts through loss of wetlands, woodlands and farmland are protected.

We recognize there is a need to improve business operations and have worked in good faith with the province, Conservation Ontario, municipalities, and partners to strengthen communication and increase transparency. Some of the proposed amendments were previously discussed and recognize the need to improve our business model. However,



many amendments are new and create significant concern regarding the role of Conservation Authorities, which are contradictory to the interests of the people of Ontario who are facing enormous risks and costs as a result of climate change and ongoing biodiversity loss.

As part of maintaining a transparent government model, we ask that municipalities have an opportunity to review and understand the potential impacts of these changes prior to moving forward with a new framework. Some of our concerns are outlined below.

- **Removal of citizen appointees:** These members are critical for providing diversity, expertise, and local perspectives. They are engaged with the needs of the watershed, ensure Boards make decisions with integrity, speak with Councils to promote municipal messaging, and alleviate conflicting pressures from Councillors who are stretched by their current duties. This may have significant impacts on reaching quorum to ensure timely decisions are continued and may create an avenue for heightened conflict of interest.
- **Removal of the watershed-based approach:** Natural assets and features span municipal boundaries. All municipalities strive for environmental resilience to protect and conserve their communities. Without a watershed approach, overall governance of these features is no longer consistent, removes connectivity, may have impacts on habitat, water quality and quantity of neighboring communities, and contradicts the purpose of the Conservation Authorities Act and conservation authorities.
- **Removal of public safety provision:** Through enabling Ministries to decide and override natural hazard management provisions during appeals for planning and permitting of development applications, the flood mitigation and science-based land use planning activities to protect people and property will be removed and timing of appeals will be elongated. Who will be accountable for the implications of these files?
- **Aggressive timeline for implementation:** Entering into municipal agreements for service delivery of essential non-mandatory programming is proposed to be completed and integrated into the 2022 budget. This is insufficient timing to ensure a responsible, accountable, and transparent process is completed by both conservation authorities and respective municipalities understanding the budget development cycle. Conservation authorities want to work with the province to support the Made-In-Ontario Environment Plan and propose further time for consultation, review, and negotiation to effectively implement any proposed changes by 2023.



Cataraqi Conservation continues to remain accountable to all our watershed municipalities by providing open and transparent operations, which include regular and timely financial reports, agendas, minutes, and has worked hard to improve consultation with watershed municipalities to understand our role, provide feedback during budget development, and value the ongoing programs, some of which are solely funded on a self-generated revenue basis without cost to the municipalities.

Cataraqi Conservation does not want to see an increased risk to public safety, or increased liabilities to the Province, municipalities, and Conservation Authorities. Nor do we want more red tape, disruption and ultimately delays in helping the government achieve its goal of economic recovery. Given the time sensitive nature of this Bill, the Cataraqi Conservation Board recently passed a motion to respectfully request that the Province remove Schedule 6 from Bill 229 and consult with municipalities and partners through meaningful dialogue.

On behalf of the Cataraqi Conservation Board of Directors, I appreciate your time to consider our concerns and look forward to further discussion. Together we can find the best solution to deal with the actual issues, and those which are perceived, while moving forward to support the intent of the province in an effective manner.

Respectfully yours,

Alan Revill,
Chair
Cataraqi Region Conservation Authority

cc:

Honourable Doug Ford, Premier of Ontario
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Mark Gerretsen, M.P., Kingston and The Islands
Randy Hilliar M.P.P. Lanark, Frontenac, Lennox and Addington
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