

Welcome and Introduction

I'm excited to announce that because protecting our environment matters everywhere in Ontario that this town hall is being livestreamed to communities across Ontario.

These past few weeks there have been a whirlwind of information regarding changes to our environment, so much so that it can be difficult to keep up. Just in the past two weeks there has been massive public outrage to the governments Budget Bill, Bill 229, and the impacts it will have on our conservation authorities and their ability to protect our environment. The Independent Auditor General of Ontario released her 2020 Annual reports on the Environment which clearly show not only are not taking sufficient action on Climate Change this government has violated Ontarians environmental rights on multiple occasions writing "ministries had many instances of non-compliance with the Ontario Environmental Bill of Rights Act and overall compliance worsened in 2019/20". All of this at the same time the Minister of Environment has quietly passed more Ministry Zoning Orders, during the pandemic than the previous government passed during its entire 15 years in office. Including in Durham where a provincially significant wetland is being turned into a warehouse, a development that the government needed to go out of its way to approve is being awarded to a PC donor. All of this news has come out so rapidly that its hard see how unpopular and understand how devastating these changes will be not just today but for decades into the future.

Ontarians deserve a government that is capable of handling simultaneous crisis. Because as we are faced with COVID-19's second wave, we are also in the midst of a housing crisis and the climate crisis. Yet despite the urgency for action to address these undeniable crises we are seeing our government move backwards on keeping both us and our environment safe. Multiple ministries have not yet included addressing climate change into their mandate.

In the wake of this sea of bad news, one thing has become clear it is more important than ever that Ontarians begin having conversations and taking action to better protect our environment and address climate change. That is why I am so excited to be joined tonight by Dr. Lynda Lukasik the executive director of Environment Hamilton and Keith Brooks the Program Director at Environmental Defense so we can have these necessary conversations with all of you and begin to imagine a better future worth protecting.

Environment Hamilton: <https://www.environmenthamilton.org/>

Environmental Defense: <https://environmentaldefence.ca/about-us/>

What got us here?

I imagine many folks on the call tonight want to delve deeper into Bill 229 but before we do I just want to chat about what got us here. As I mentioned earlier, the Independent

Office of The Auditor General's 2020 Annual report on the Environment found not only was Ontario not doing enough moving forward but that this government is actively and repeatedly violating Ontarian's Environmental Rights.

Q2: Part of the AG report were ministerial report cards - How would you rate this government on environmental issues? What are your biggest concerns?

- Both Lynda and Keith gave failing grades listing concerns regarding underfunding of ministries conservation and flood prevention work, repeatedly failing to use the environmental registry of Ontario to notify Ontarian's of changes to the environment as is mandated through the environmental Bill of rights, including nearly 300 instances just during the COVID-19 pandemic which had no connection to pandemic response, breaking the law by cancelling Ontario's Cap and Trade program, firing the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario and replacing her office with the Auditor General who has a narrower scope, failing to meaningfully address climate change, failing to achieve their own targets regarding natural gas conservation.
- Both mentioned that more than once that when these stories became public media reported connections to and conversations with developers and PC donors as being linked to the government's decision making.
 - o <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/doug-ford-greenbelt-housing-vaughan-milani-rizmi-developer-1.5263980>

Q3: This government pursued similarly controversial legislation regarding developing the Greenbelt earlier in its term. Both of you were involved in pushing back against that decision could you tell us a bit about that issue, what you did, and what effect it had?

- Both Environment Hamilton and Environmental Defense focused on educating and organizing Ontarians to speak up and take action against these changes.
 - o Examples included workshops on how to comment through the environmental registry of Ontario, phone all campaigns, email campaigns, and political demonstrations in front of the Minister of Environment's Office
- There was a broad coalition of folks across Ontario creating ensuring their voices were heard by the government. Municipalities, and other groups also passed resolutions speaking against Schedule 10 of Bill 66.
- Ultimately effective: Minister announced in a tweet that the schedule was being removed.
- We know organizing like this can work both speakers agreed Bill 229 is similarly controversial and widely unpopular legislation

What's happening now?

Q4: Keith, Could you describe the change put forward in this legislation? What are your concerns about how these changes will play out across the province?

- Changes would limit the ability of conservation authorities to act on a watershed level instead forcing them to operate within municipal boundaries.

- Changes would remove citizen members from conservation authority boards
- Bill 229 proposes to eliminate a conservation authority's participation in appeals under the Planning Act. The proposed amendments would make conservation authorities part of the province's "one window" approach to planning. This would mean that a conservation authority, as a "public body" under the Planning Act, would lose the ability to appeal a municipal council's decision to the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal (the "LPAT"). Further, a conservation authority would not be permitted to become a party to a Planning Act appeal.

Read more:

- [https://www.airdberlis.com/insights/publications/publication/conservation-authorities-re-imagined-amendments-to-the-conservation-authorities-act-through-bill-229-protect-support-and-recover-from-covid-19-act-\(budget-measures\)-2020](https://www.airdberlis.com/insights/publications/publication/conservation-authorities-re-imagined-amendments-to-the-conservation-authorities-act-through-bill-229-protect-support-and-recover-from-covid-19-act-(budget-measures)-2020)
- <https://environmentaldefence.ca/2020/11/13/expect-bigger-floods-and-more-toxic-soil-if-ontarios-conservation-authorities-are-gutted/>
- <https://environmentaldefence.ca/2020/11/11/crucial-protect-ontarios-wetlands/>
- <https://environmentaldefence.ca/2020/11/20/28031auditor-general-scathing-report/>

Q5 Lynda, what could the effect of these changes have locally here in Hamilton? What are some local concerns (ex. Flooding, loss of farmland, etc.) that you think Hamiltonians should be raising with this government?

- Conservation Authorities are essential. It's important to look and the ecology of the system not as it relates to municipal boundaries but in its entirety because we know changes in one area of a watershed will impact other areas.
- Saltfleet conservation area is a new area soon to open in upper Stoney Creek that will drastically reduce flooding in the lower city
- The cost of not acting on climate change is insurmountable from insurance costs, to infrastructure damage and repair, to loss of housing etc.
- Hamiltonians should be reaching out because this is an issue that will impact us right here in our city

From violating Ontarian's environmental rights by not allowing us opportunity or time to comment on government decisions to taking away the ability of conservation authorities to appeal planning decisions or have citizen members, the effect of this government's decisions is the removal of public engagement from environmental decision making. While it gets harder and harder for Ontarian's to speak up against these changes, developers seem to have no trouble getting the minister's attention. So in the face of this its time to talk about what we can do to ensure our voices are heard.

How to stand up and why it matters

Q6: How do you recommend concerned people have their voices heard?

Both Keith and Lynda recommended reaching out to government MPPs as well as your local MPP over email and phone as well as considering what further actions you can take to have your voice heard.

Environmental defense has this resource available:

<https://environmentaldefence.ca/2020/11/26/respond-form-letters-sent-ontario-mpps-regard-provinces-attack-conservation-authorities/>

MPP Shaw's Office shared the following in the chat:

5 WAYS YOU CAN HELP TODAY:

1. RSVP for the emergency town hall this Thursday from 6:00-7:30pm at www.sandyshawmpp.ca/water (You all can check this one off!)
2. This government needs to hear from you again. Please consider writing an email and calling the Minister of Environment MPP Jeff Yurek: <http://www.infogo.gov.on.ca/infogo/home.html#orgProfile/708/en> and the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing MPP Steve Clark: <http://www.infogo.gov.on.ca/infogo/home.html#orgProfile/1143/en>
3. Host a Phone Zap like Hamilton 350 did today: <https://www.facebook.com/events/417644735931899/>
4. Participate in the committee process: to sign up for Committee using OLA web tool: <https://www.ola.org/en/apply-committees?prvcachecommwf=1603744481518>
Deadline for Written Submissions: **Wed 2 Dec, 7:00pm**. Select Bill 229 when addressing your feedback.
5. Connect with friends and like minded groups in building a coalition to protect our environment.

Learn More:

Hamilton Spectator Editorial: <https://www.thespec.com/opinion/editorials/2020/11/13/dont-give-free-rein-to-ontarios-developers.html>

Ontario Nature Campaign: <https://ontarionature.org/campaigns/conservation-authorities/>

Canadian Environmental Law Association Resources: <https://cela.ca/action-alert-we-need-our-conservation-authorities/>

Environmental Defense Campaign: <https://environmentaldefence.ca/2020/11/13/expect-bigger-floods-and-more-toxic-soil-if-ontarios-conservation-authorities-are-gutted/>

Hamilton Conservation Authority's Response: <https://conservationhamilton.ca/hcas-preliminary-response-to-the-provinces-proposed-changes-to-the-conservation-authorities-act/>

Looking forward I think we need the Ontario Government to make climate and environment decisions that prioritize public engagement and consent. I introduced the Cootes Paradise Water Accountability Act which would amend section 30 on the Water Resources Act to ensure Ontarians are notified when a spill happens in their community. This is not what happened in Hamilton with tragic news of our sewage spill. My bill comes from the belief in and importance of citizen action. There was massive

public outcry and political pressure to clean up our environment after this tragedy, when Ontarians know what's happening to their environment they want to act.

Wrapping up:

Lisa from the Hamilton Conservation Authority joined us to reaffirm the importance of standing up to protect our conservation authorities and the important work they do. The Hamilton Conservation Authority and Conservation Ontario have been advocating the government walk back these changes.

Panelists spoke about the importance of moving forward on protecting our environment and addressing the climate crisis, yet it feels like in Ontario this government is taking us backwards.

Sandy thanked everyone for attending and having these important conversations and reminded people to take action in the coming days including talking to friends and family, calling and emailing MPPs, written submissions to the committee, hosting a phone zap, learning more.

There were requests in the chat for MPP Contact information:

- MPP Jeff Yurek jeff.yurek@pc.ola.org, 519-631-0666 Minister of Environment Conservation and Parks 416-314-6790 | minister.mecp@ontario.ca
- MPP Steve Clark steve.clark@pc.ola.org, 613-342-9522, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing minister.mah@ontario.ca, 416-585-7000
- MPP Rod Phillips rod.phillips@pc.ola.org, 905-427-2060, Minister of Finance 416-325-0400 | Minister.fin@ontario.ca
- MPP Peter Bethlenfalvy peter.bethlenfalvy@pc.ola.org, 905-509-0336, President of the Treasury Board | 416-327-2333 | Peter.Bethlenfalvy@Ontario.ca
- MPP Donna Skelly donna.skelly@pc.ola.org, 905-679-3770 and Donna.Skelly@ontario.ca
- MPP Doug Ford doug.fordco@pc.ola.org, 416-745-2859, Premier of Ontario, 416-325-1941

Other requested resources:

- <https://www.auditor.on.ca/en/content/annualreports/arbyyear/ar2020.html>
- <https://www.elections.on.ca/en/political-financing0.html>
- <https://www.ola.org/en/legislative-business/bills/parliament-42/session-1/bill-229>