



January 29, 2019

Director
Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing
Housing Division, Market Housing Branch
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Re: Conservation Ontario's Comments on the "Consultation: Increasing Housing Supply in Ontario"
(ERO #013-4190)

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written comments on the "Consultation: Increasing Housing Supply in Ontario" (ERO#013-4190). Conservation Ontario appreciated the opportunity to participate in the 'Consultation on the Planning Act and Provincial Policy Statement' workshop on January 14, 2019. Conservation Ontario is the network of Ontario's 36 conservation authorities (CAs). In addition to these comments provided through the Environmental Registry, Conservation Ontario has produced a blog entitled, [Putting Growth in the Right Spot – Ensuring Public Health and Safety: A Response to the Housing Supply Consultation](#). These comments as well as the blog post are not intended to limit consideration of comments shared individually by CAs through the consultation process.

The purpose of the blog post (attached) is to respond directly to the questions posed in the "Consultation Document: Increasing Housing Supply in Ontario". The purpose of this letter is to respond to the questions posed as part of the January 14th workshop, as it relates to the implementation of the *Planning Act* and Provincial Policy Statement (PPS).

Background

Conservation authorities have considerable expertise in land use planning. Conservation authority roles in land use planning include: as a regulator under Section 28 of the *Conservation Authorities Act*; as a public commenting body under the *Planning Act* and *Environmental Assessment Act*; as source protection authorities under the *Clean Water Act* supporting policy implementation; as resource management agencies operating on a local watershed basis; as a body with delegated authority in plan review to represent the provincial interest for natural hazards; and as the province's second largest landowners who may become involved in the planning and development process, either as an adjacent landowner or a proponent. In these roles, CAs endeavour to provide the best guidance to their municipal partners regarding how to balance multiple provincial and watershed priorities.

Conservation authorities are solution-oriented agencies, who represent aspects of the provincial interest in protecting public health and safety and work closely with their municipal partners to ensure development proposals uphold these interests. CAs continue to be committed to streamlining planning processes and to providing the best guidance to their municipal partners in a timely and cost-effective

manner. Conservation authorities are prepared to assist the Province with identifying those streamlining opportunities as well.

Review of the Provincial Approvals Process

We understand from the invitation to the 'Consultation on the Planning Act and Provincial Policy Statement' workshop on January 14, 2019 that the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing is "undertaking a fundamental review of all aspects of the development approvals process". The reviews of the Provincial Policy Statement (PPS) and the *Planning Act* are intended to identify barriers and unnecessary steps in the process; focused on transformative change. Conservation Ontario very much appreciates the opportunity to participate in this initial workshop and respectfully requests an opportunity to provide further input into proposed changes to the PPS and *Planning Act* moving forward.

A limitation associated with the January 14, 2019 workshop was that it was single industry specific. It is recommended that future workshops should be arranged to provide opportunity for multi-sector dialogue that can contribute to solution-oriented recommendations. In order to assist the government in realizing their one year service delivery guarantee, there is a need to understand all aspects of the development approvals process and to identify any bottlenecks in that process. The review should look both at speed, as well as the purpose of the planning process in place, in order to make the best planning decisions. Changes to the development approval process should reflect the public interest, while looking at ways to remove bottlenecks, improve service and deliver on the important purposes of the planning process.

In order to identify barriers within the development approvals process, it is recommended that, in addition to multi-sector dialogue, a series of representative design charrettes be undertaken across the province. These charrettes will go a long way to identifying bottlenecks in the process, understanding the purpose of different approvals, and identifying opportunities for streamlining these approvals. This work should be undertaken to improve the development approvals process in Ontario however the province should acknowledge and account for all factors that are impacting housing affordability in their *Housing Supply Action Plan*. There is opportunity beyond the *Planning Act* and the PPS to assist the province in meeting its objectives for improving housing supply and reducing costs, and CAs are prepared to assist in identifying those opportunities as part of a multi-sector approach.

Planning Act – Placemat Questions from the January 14th Workshop

The following comments are designed to address the questions from the January 14th workshop. Generally, Conservation Ontario is supportive of the "Guiding Principles to Shape Opportunities for Improvement" including:

- safeguarding public health and safety;
- continuing to protect provincial land use interests that are important to long-term economic, environmental and social well-being including protecting the Greenbelt and the environment;
- clarity of rules and flexibility for implementation are important elements of an efficient and effective land use system;
- potential solutions should consider the needs of different communities; and

- potential solutions should be practical and workable; and some matters may be best addressed by another mechanism.

Speed: Faster Decisions/Streamlining

Conservation Ontario is very supportive of undertaking changes to the complete application requirements. CAs identify that incomplete applications are a major delay to the approvals process. These incomplete applications are often not supported by technical studies that conform to industry and professional standards. Updating provincial Technical Guidelines (for example, those which support the implementation of the natural hazards portion of the PPS and reconciling them with permissions issued under the *Conservation Authorities Act*) would allow CAs to focus on resolving technical or policy issues with the proponent, rather than debating technical standards. It is appreciated that Ontario's Environment Plan commits to "update technical guidance to protect people and property from flooding and water-related hazards".

In terms of the planning appeal process, Conservation Ontario is supportive of limiting appeals on matters of public interest, including with respect to natural hazards and source water. Under the Ontario Municipal Board system, in CA experience, many appeals were based on a failure to make a decision, rather than the decision itself. In this case, the appeal tends to take place before all parties have had an opportunity to discuss their interests and seek resolution outside of a tribunal setting.

Finally, Conservation Ontario is highly supportive of having municipalities regularly update their Official Plans to take advantage of the best available information and newest provincial direction. In our comments on the Coordinated Land Use Planning Review, Conservation Ontario recommended that municipal conformity amendments to incorporate the updated provincial plan criteria should be shielded from appeal.

Costs: Certainty of Costs

The provision of parkland is important from a public health perspective. In southern Ontario, where the bulk of Ontarians are located, quality recreational space is provided in large part by CAs. Conservation areas offer a unique outdoor experience due to their proximity to highly populated areas that are not offered by other parks. The number of visitors to conservation areas continues to grow significantly and this places stresses on the ecological value of our land holdings and on the infrastructure and management of these areas. In municipalities where the land has become too valuable to purchase additional parkland, thought should be given to directing cash-in-lieu of parkland dedications to the local conservation areas to support infrastructure improvements.

Mix and Innovation: Increasing Housing Options

Conservation Ontario is supportive of increasing housing options to improve the affordability of housing. Secondary units and coach houses should only be permitted in areas outside of natural hazards and where there is sufficient infrastructure to support the increased density (for example, as it relates to stormwater management). Most conservation authorities have hazard mapping available which can help to direct secondary units to areas in the province with the least amount of risk to public safety.

Provincial Policy Statement – Placemat Questions from the January 14th Workshop

Increasing Housing Supply and Mix

Generally, CAs feel that the current Provincial Policy Statement (PPS) is functioning well and that new PPS policies would likely not facilitate an increase in housing supply. Further efficiencies and clarity of requirements could be realized through updating provincial guidelines under the PPS which provide direction for implementing provincial policies (e.g., Stormwater Management Guidelines, Watershed Planning Guidelines, Flood and Erosion Hazard Management, etc.).

Supporting Certainty and Economic Growth

Conservation Ontario believes that the province and municipalities can support certainty and economic growth by identifying any constraints to development early on in the process. The completion of comprehensive, long-range technical studies (e.g., watershed plans, floodplain mapping, subwatershed studies) prior to advancing planning or development applications will support this certainty. These studies are not intended to delay applications that are already in the approval process but would enable municipalities and conservation authorities moving forward to make more informed decisions about the allocation of growth and land use, stormwater management, conservation and restoration of the natural heritage system, and the protection of new development from natural hazards. The studies also clarify expectations and requirements for development prior to detailed design.

Rural and Northern Communities

Conservation Ontario recognizes that many rural and northern communities are facing low or no growth scenarios. This, coupled with a smaller tax base, makes it more difficult to complete complex studies to facilitate growth. In these cases, the studies could be completed at a watershed, rather than subwatershed level. It is recommended that the Province best support the protection of water resources through a watershed management approach which recognizes the integrated nature of hydrological and ecological systems across Ontario. CAs have considerable expertise in applying a watershed management approach and can partner with the Province, municipalities, and other stakeholders to effectively protect public health and safety, including through protecting water quality.

Reducing Barriers/Costs

Conservation Ontario has the following suggestions to help improve the planning system to facilitate development:

- Require pre-consultation with approval agencies such as conservation authorities so that submission requirements are clear.
- Develop user-friendly guidance materials for approval authorities which could simplify the approval process and requirements for approvals for developers.
- Better define what makes up a complete application, including enabling approval authorities to determine the sufficiency of a submission and the accompanying studies prior to deeming an application complete.

- Update and simplify the technical guidelines which support the implementation of the planning system. For greater efficiency and certainty for proponents, in addition to supporting land use planning decisions under the PPS, the updated technical guidance for hazard management should also serve as technical guidance for permit decisions under the *Conservation Authorities Act*.
- Look at opportunities to consolidate technical and environmental reviews to agencies with local expertise rather than having multiple agencies undertake similar reviews.
- Undertake representative design charrettes across the province to understand bottlenecks in the approval process.
- Consider provincially-led environmental assessments to establish servicing in areas of high growth.
- Ensure the costs of growth are shared; new development needs to be able to help address current aging infrastructure and contribute to the building of new infrastructure – both of which are needed to support additional housing.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input into the “Consultation: Increasing Housing Supply in Ontario” and for enabling our participation in the ‘Consultation on the Planning Act and Provincial Policy Statement’ workshop on January 14, 2019. Conservation Ontario looks forward to continuing to assist the Province with identifying streamlining opportunities and would appreciate being engaged in further discussions about proposed changes to the *Planning Act* and/or the Provincial Policy Statement. Should you have any questions regarding these comments, please contact me at extension 226.

Sincerely,



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Policy and Planning Liaison

c.c.: All CA CAOs/GMs

Encl.

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