

Orangeville Council passes resolution supporting conservation authorities

By **Sam Odrowski**

Orangeville Council unanimously passed a resolution at Monday night's meeting, requesting that the provincial government doesn't repeal legislation that will take power away from conservation authorities to regulate development.

The resolution refers to the removal of Schedule 6 of Bill 229, which provides the Province with the power to order dangerous development projects to proceed against the science-based decisions of conservation authorities.

Under the new bill, developers can bypass conservation authorities well-established watershed policies and science based regulations by appealing directly to the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry to issue permits in place of a conservation authority.

The permits can be issued even if the development is at risk of flooding, erosion or jeopardizing human health and safety.

"The six members plus the chair of the [Ontario] Greenbelt Council, which is suppose to be a provincial advisory committee, have all resigned in protest over the changes that are anticipated as part of this bill," said Coun. Grant Peters, who brought the resolution forward.

The resolution notes that the Town relies on watershed expertise provided by local conservation authorities to protect residents, property, and natural resources by regulating development and engaging in reviews of applications submitted under Orangeville's Planning Act. However, all of this can now be overridden by the Province under Schedule 6 of Bill 229.

"Simply put this proposed legislation will cause harm. It will increase risk to people, property and infrastructure and threaten environmentally sensitive areas," said Karen Ras, Credit Valley Conservation (CVC) Chair, in a press release.

"It contradicts recommendations by the Premier's own Special Flood Advisor regarding our role in land use planning."

CVC says Bill 229 serves to take science out of the equation for the issuance of permits, effectively politicizing the process.

"Unconstrained development in wetlands and flood-prone areas can result in costly repairs by municipalities ultimately paid for by taxpayers," said Ras. "This legislation removes the checks and balances that ensure the safe development of communities. CVC and our municipalities have called for Schedule 6 to be removed from Bill 229 and we appeal to the province to do the right thing and heed our call. No amount of development and growth is worth this cost."

Mayor Sandy Brown said the Province's decision to include Schedule 6 in Bill 229 is likely because of the amount of time it takes for conservation authorities to approve applications sent in by developers.

"I've heard it both with municipal staff and private enterprise, that the time of which they deal with things isn't reasonable," said Mayor Brown.

He noted that conservation authorities should have a guideline for the amount of time they can take when responding to applications from developers to help with the issue.

"That's the only frustration I think that people see. We want our environment to be protected, we want our flood mitigation to be a part of our development process and all of these things, the good things that conservation authorities were created for, but timelines are frustrating for a lot of people," said Mayor Brown.

"I hope conservation authorities can work on that one issue that seems to be an aggravation to people."

The Small Urban GTHA Mayors, which includes Orangeville, met on Tuesday to discuss Schedule 6 of Bill 229 and voiced their opposition.

They're calling on the Province to immediately remove Schedule 6 and begin a dialogue and consultation with Heads of Council and Conservation Authorities on issues and concerns impacting our communities across the Province. The Small Urban GTHA Mayors added that open consultation and dialogue between municipal levels of government have proved to be a valuable exercise to reach mutually common goals in the past and they believe the contents of Schedule 6 are significant and require more consultation.