

GUTTING CONSERVATION AUTHORITIES

Like a thief in the night, the Ontario government believed it could get away with inserting a host of changes to the province's conservation authorities within this year's budget bill that would denude the organizations of power over development applications.

It seems the government's stealth strategy was to hide the changes from municipalities and authorities and avoid following the traditional public engagement process by announcing the changes through the Environmental Bill of Rights, which requires a 30-day public input period.

But since the Ford government has been known for avoiding public consultation, it is no surprise that once the changes were discovered by conservation authorities a groundswell of opposition has steadily risen against the idea of potentially allowing development on floodplains and environmentally sensitive areas.

While critics are left scratching their heads about the reasoning behind the evisceration of the powers of conservation authorities, there is really no mystery. The PCs are simply rewarding their development industry pals who have long complained about the authorities' environmental laws obstructing their money-making ventures.

Conservation authorities have been empowered to control flooding, and restoring the land, water and natural habitats of the province. They have done such a great job, that developers consider them a main threat to their ability to build.

Among the changes contained in Bill 229 include shifting any decision-making power about the watershed from the authorities to the minister, allowing planning applicants to appeal a development decision to the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal, removing conservation authorities' power to issue stop work orders when catastrophic damage is occurring in a protected area, and — the true mystery — eliminating citizen members on authority boards.

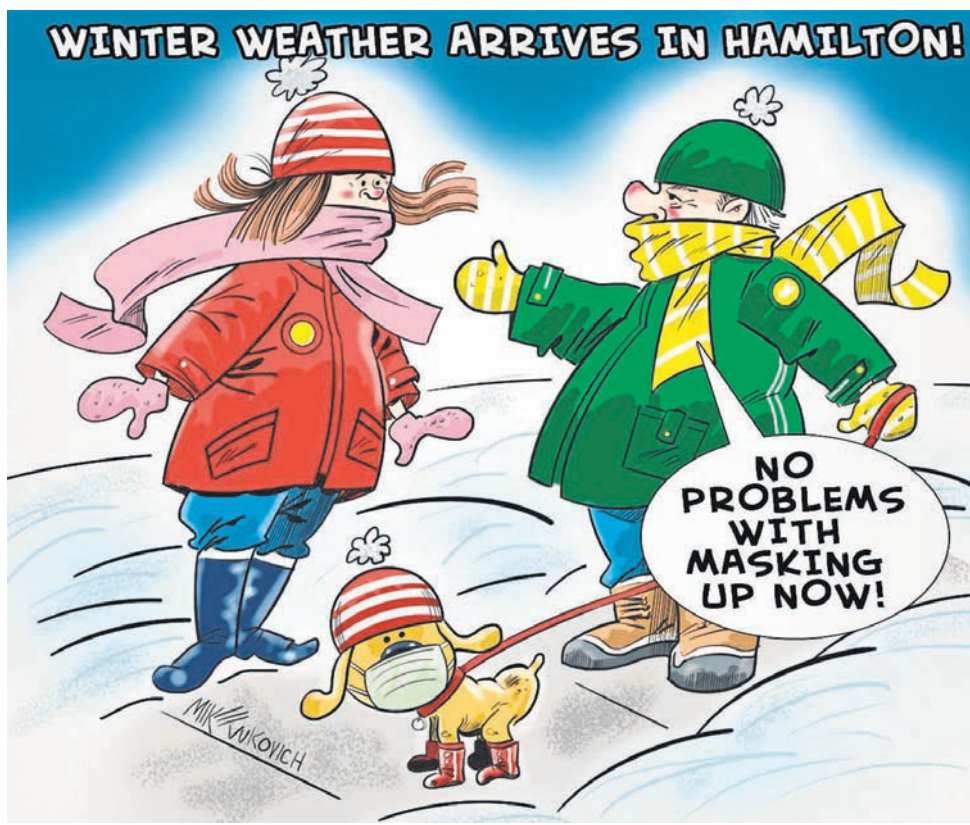
If the proposed changes are adopted, any river, floodplain, wetland, Great Lakes shoreline, even any water supply will be at the mercy of erosion, degradation and neglect.

If the government actually wanted to improve the work of conservation authorities, start by returning the funding that was taken away from them. Next, streamline the rules to make municipalities and conservation authorities adhere to tighter deadlines to complete planning reviews.

It is no secret that the Ford government has been itching to help its business friends, from threatening to open up the Greenbelt for more development, building highways through prime farmland, exploiting the Niagara Escarpment's natural wonders for aggregates to cutting "red tape" in an effort to streamline the economy at the expense of the protecting the province's biodiversity.

It is quickly apparent, the government's goal is not to improve efficiently or hold authorities accountable, but it is to eliminate a persist thorn in the side of developers and back their money-for-nothing agenda at the expense of the future of Ontario's environment.

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LETTERS & COMMENTARY

DEVELOPMENT INCOMPATIBLE

The proposal by Columbia College to develop the site at 574 Northcliffe Ave. contradicts many environmental and development standards.

Although repurposing this amazing property, formerly a convent for the Sisters of St. Joseph, is certainly desirable, its location in an eco-sensitive area does not support a 1,000-student school with staff.

A college of this size would be better situated in an urban area, close to transit, amenities, and existing infrastructure.

If we have any hope of halting climate change and conserving our precious green spaces, it is imperative that large development projects are not permitted in rural, ecologically sensitive, greenbelt or wetland locations.

MARGOT CARNAHAN,
DUNDAS

POT SHOP DOESN'T BELONG

I recently read that an application for a marijuana shop in the residential

neighbourhood of Perth Park (Hatton Drive, Ancaster) was approved.

Clearly the many objections of safety from the neighbourhood were silenced by the monetary value of this economic activity.

I have two wishes. First is that the people boycott this location in favour of one of the two existing pot shops approved for Ancaster.

Secondly is that each board member of the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario be allowed to experience of the total spectrum of the marijuana-using community firsthand as they invade their residential neighbourhood.

JIM GILLATLY,
ANCASTER

JUST ACCEPT IT

So, it's the final game of the best of seven series, the Reds against the Blues, for the national championship. The Reds are not doing well, with batter after batter striking or grounding out, while the Blues scratch out some runs. The

Reds manager, Donald Chump, described as "feisty" by his friends and "an idiot" by others, is getting more and more upset, especially when a Blues star steals second base. Immediately, Donald was in the umpire's face, screaming, "It was not a legal steal," despite video replays showing the batter was clearly safe.

With the Blues at bat, the Reds relief pitcher wanted a strike called, and it wasn't, so Donald again ran up to the plate ump and told him he was fired. The chief umpire explained that he could not do that, so he was fired also.

Finally, the exasperated umpires tossed Donald Chump from the game, with loud cheers of relief from at least half the crowd. The final score was Blues 4, Reds 1 — but fans yelled that they had been robbed. Seems they had trouble reading the scoreboard.

Moral of the story: you win some, you lose some. Accept it.

SIMON IRVING,
DUNDAS

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COUNCIL'S THIN SKIN

Hamilton city council already had a frayed relationship with the community, but 2020 has also revealed several councillors' contentious attitudes and bullying tactics toward residents who have been critical of their decisions and views.

While there has been a noticeable antagonism by councillors directed against the public, especially over planning and policing issues, for some their thin skin has started to show since council adopted virtual public meetings. In some cases, these encounters between councillors and members of the public has been, frankly, an embarrassment to the city.

To be fair, several councillors may have a reason to be sensitive toward certain segments of the public. At least two, and their office staff, have had to endure hate-filled social media posts and threatening telephone calls. Other councillors have had a running battle against social media provocateurs who take sadistic pleasure at poking a stick at their favourite councillor's hide, waiting gleefully for a response.

So it's not quite a shock that city staff have been examining excluding some of the letters sent to councillors that normally appear on various committees' and council's public agendas.

The city clerks argue that since councillors are not authorized to discuss code of conduct issues, critical letters should instead be sent to the integrity commissioner for review. The clerks, and the city's solicitor, say that limiting publication of critical letters isn't an infringement of a person's right to free speech because the city is not banning the critical letters outright.

It's a specious argument predicated upon preventing the public from hearing a resident's complaint about a councillor. It fundamentally limits a resident's ability to make a point and air an issue and would make clerks the gatekeepers in charge of protecting the reputation of councillors.

Municipalities and other public bodies make broad decisions that have wide-reaching impacts across society. They are supposed to make those decisions in a free, open and democratic manner. However, in some cases Hamilton staff and councillors have knowingly tried to limit the public's right to know through questionable decisions, whether it is holding unauthorized in camera meetings, or skirting the rules to hold private gatherings, or curtailing freedom of expression requests. It is only when municipalities can be challenged for their decisions and actions, and held to account that the democratic principle is upheld.

A municipality cannot issue an order against a person's liberty in a capricious manner without a valid public purpose. Under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, a government must show its actions to limit an individual's rights or freedoms impair those rights as little as possible.

Hamilton city staff have argued that there is a need to balance the rights of individuals and that staff have an obligation to "guide" information that is critical of councillors away from public view and toward an opaque process.

But what the city is really trying to do is minimize disruption that a critical letter will have on a councillor. It's not preserving order and ensuring the safety and security of staff. It's merely attempting to preserve the reputation of councillors.

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■ LETTERS & COMMENTARY

RECIPE FOR DISASTER

How can we guarantee rapid and widespread COVID? Simple. Delay effective control measures/restrictions two months beyond obvious rampant COVID data.

Institute grey-zone lockdowns for the GTA and environs near year-end, with minimal constraints elsewhere. Don't enact cross-region travel restrictions. Lockdown Hamilton but not Halton, Niagara and nearby districts until Boxing Day.

It's the perfect storm: encouraging shoppers and revellers to migrate extensively, criss-crossing Southern Ontario, spreading disease.

Allow people from grey zones to travel to "open" regions, carrying COVID, and spreading it into our own communities by the newly infected.

Don't apply effective systems to monitor, report, and enforce COVID transgressions by scofflaws.

Then sit back and watch cases spike, with hospitals and medical professionals overwhelmed beyond human capacity, with sickness and death.

ROMEO PALOMBELLA,
HAMILTON MOUNTAIN

STOP POINTING FINGERS

Paul Johnson, general manager of Healthy and Safe Communities, recently suggested that visitors are spreading the virus in long-term care homes. Visitors must not be wearing masks then, though you can't enter any facility without wearing one.

It has been over eight months since horrid conditions were unveiled in long-term care homes and we are still hearing stories of facilities being understaffed, health care workers short of personal protective equipment and residents being left unattended, with some not even getting basic medical care. Residents are also being cramped together with lit-

tle distancing, so much so that residents are infecting each other.

Johnson should stop pointing fingers at the visitors and look to the provincial government, who has turned a blind eye to long-term care residents and health-care workers.

TINA MAINI,
HAMILTON

MEMORIES

It was interesting to hear that our local Dundas Star was returning to its original 'front page.' My Aunt living here in Dundas, faithfully mailed the weekly edition during the 1940s and 50s to my dad and our family living in Saskatchewan.

We moved to Dundas in 1954 and have continued to enjoy the Dundas Star.

TREVOR JONES,
DUNDAS



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IS CHANGE COMING TO COUNCIL?

Hamilton is undergoing a significant transitional, possibly even a generational, change in its political leadership.

Familiar names are retiring, starting with Conservative MP David Sweet for Flamborough-Glanbrook. He was followed by Hamilton Mountain NDP MP Scott Duvall, and, in a show of political principle, former mayor and Hamilton East-Stoney Creek Liberal MP Bob Bratina.

The political change at the federal level could filter down to the municipal level with several councillors contemplating their own political futures in the lead-up to the 2022 municipal election.

Over the decades in Hamilton there have been citizens and groups angry at councillors for the way decisions have — or have not — been made, the lack of decorum, ignoring issues and usurping the public's will. Attempts to remove councillors or challenge them in elections have failed since the majority of residents, those who actually vote, continue to elect incumbents either because they believe they have done a good job or because they simply are a known commodity.

But the latest attempt to challenge Hamilton's political status quo could generate different results.

That transformation could be enabled by the community-led organization IELECT Hamilton, a core group of about 50 people, joined by others from what they say represent all of the city's wards to elect councillors that are more responsive to residents' needs, while also exhibiting bold leadership.

While the group says it will not endorse a slate of candidates, there is no doubt where its political loyalties lie. They want people who will support the LRT; eliminate area rating; aggressively deal with racists and promote anti-hate policies and address climate change.

But on a more granular level, the group wants council to be one of respectful discourse, provide intelligent and inclusive debate, welcome new and innovative ideas and for the most part value citizens' input.

If nothing more, IELECT Hamilton is providing a necessary service to residents by tapping into the frustration, confusion, and outright anger at Hamilton's changing community. They are pointing their fingers at council for not providing the proper leadership.

Still, current councillors have made progress on several of IELECT Hamilton's priority issues, such as building more affordable housing units, establishing a 10-year transit policy, moving forward with the LRT, addressing the environment and climate change and diversifying the economy.

However, the crux of all these programs is they all cost money and over the years councillors have been extremely cautious about raising taxes.

Hamilton is a transformational community that deserves a diverse and innovative leadership. It also desperately needs an electorate that takes the time to get involved in how the community is governed. Without the public's interest, the city's politics will be left behind to fester to become numb to anything but their own self-interests.



■ LETTERS & COMMENTARY

WE NEED LRT

I want to congratulate the federal, provincial and municipal leaders for recognizing that the future of our community starts with key infrastructure development, one that includes multimodal transportation being recognized as an integral part.

\$3.4 billion is the injection of cash our city needs to ensure that we create a corridor to sustain commercial and residential growth. It's a great opportunity for Hamilton east to west to enjoy the benefits of a long-term investment that has the foresight to see that anything short of a concrete transit corridor will leave the city with no choice but to continue to pave over farmlands and green spaces.

My children will be happy to know that when the time came to invest in their future that our federal, provincial and municipal

leaders listened to Hamilton residents and chose to support their vision for growth and backed it with cash instead of lip service.

EDWARD HARRIS,
STONEY CREEK

SAVE THE WETLANDS

Re: Wetland Relocation Battle Heats Up, May 20

We are in the middle of a climate crisis, HERE and NOW. This is the decade when we must act to ensure clean air and pure water.

Yet, Coun. Lloyd Ferguson and Developer One Properties Real Estate Inc. have put forward a premature and ill-conceived proposal to pave over a wetland in favour of a 3,000 car parking lot and five massive but unneeded warehouses.

Wetlands are natural features located by natural processes, not cement retaining ponds. Because they are so ecologically productive, they are the

single best sink for carbon dioxide (better than trees) and provide critical habitat for many species.

Think of the thousands of wild creatures who depend on the wetland for their survival. They cannot escape the deadly jaws of the bulldozer; they will be crushed or buried alive - a terrible death. The historic Ancaster watershed will be decimated; it is the only remaining watershed still in its original position. It provides natural storm water control and water filtering, which benefits all of us.

We must save the wetlands!

If you have children/grandchildren, the greatest legacy you can leave them is a healthy planet.

MARIE COVERT,
DUNDAS



SCAN FOR MORE
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