

2020

Comments re: Bill 229, Protect, Support and Recover from Covid-19 Act (Budget Measures)



Jane Veit

Private Citizen

12/1/2020

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December 1, 2020

Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs
99 Wellesley Street West
Room 1405 Whitney Block
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Toronto, ON M7A 1A2

Attn: Amarjot Sandhu, MPP, Chair
Julia Douglas, Clerk

CC: Hon. Rod Phillips, Minister of Finance
Hon. Doug Ford, Premier of Ontario
MPP Vijay Thanigasalam, Member for Scarborough - Rouge Park

Re: Bill 229, Protect, Support and Recover from Covid-19 Act (Budget Measures) 2020

I am writing to you today as a citizen of this great province of Ontario, recently retired and living in the Riding of Scarborough – Rouge Park in the Highland Creek Watershed. I am truly blessed to live in an area where green space has been preserved and protected from development and flooding over the years. (Hurricane Hazel and I both share the same birth year 1954) Local natural areas have become even more important to me since Covid-19 arrived and I have spent much of the year walking trails in the area after working from home, and more recently upon my retirement.

I was very distressed to hear that the latest budget bill "Protect, Support and Recover" contains a schedule (Schedule 6) that will limit the power of conservation authorities (CAs) across Ontario. The legislation will make it difficult for any CA to take action and issue stop work orders against such activities as illegal dumping in our watersheds and will limit the Authorities jurisdiction in protecting green space, environmentally sensitive areas and natural habitats including significant wetlands from development.

It is my understanding that a full review of the Conservation Authority Act took place under the previous government in 2017, so one wonders at the reasoning behind these surprise changes to “protect and support.” Conservation Authorities have been around for at least 60 years and their numerous activities have served the citizens of this province well, and introduced countless newcomers to the watersheds that we have all come to enjoy. The photo on the cover to this submission is of Highland Creek.

You are no doubt receiving a number of submissions from organizations and groups that are concerned about ongoing threats to our environment, natural habitats and standard of living threatened by global warming. I will leave it to those experts to provide their arguments for science-based decision making and to argue against making changes to the CA Act. I truly support the efforts to remove Schedule 6 from the proposed bill and believe that CAs likely need more powers to continue to protect us.

From a management aspect, I also take issue with the proposal to remove citizen members from the boards of CA's and to have board members be answerable to their municipalities rather than the mandate of each Authority. All Conservation Authority members should be acting in the best interest of the Board. Having a variety of members including citizen appointees ensures that we are all looking out for our watersheds with a view to protecting our homes and much needed green spaces such as those in the Highland Creek Watershed.

Let us continue to support our Conservation Authorities by removing Schedule 6 from the budget bill and allow CAs to continue to put measures in place to protect and support our watersheds and to preserve and enhance the quality of life in Ontario as a place to grow and discover.

Respectfully submitted,

Jane Veit (signed)