

Greenbelt Council

777 Bay Street, 13<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Toronto ON M7A 2J3  
Tel.: 416-585-6014

Conseil de la ceinture de  
verdure

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Conseil de la  
ceinture de verdure

November 19, 2020

The Honourable Steve Clark  
Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing  
777 Bay Street, 17<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Toronto, ON M5G 2E5

Re: Removal of Schedule 6 from Ontario Bill 229

Dear Minister Clark,

I am writing today to advise you of the Greenbelt Council's considerable concern over two recent government actions that serve to undermine watershed planning and put at risk key natural heritage and hydrologic features in this province—proposed changes to the *Conservation Authorities Act* contained in Schedule 6 of Bill 229 and the increasingly extensive use of Ministerial Zoning Orders (MZOs).

Fundamental to both the *Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe* and the *Greenbelt Plan*, watershed planning is vital to the Conservation Authorities' (CAs) core mandate.

#### The Future of Conservation Authorities

As you are aware, Council has been tracking the government's reconsideration of the role and functioning of CAs for some time and has offered its views in previous discussions. However, recent public statements and proposed legislation, in particular Schedule 6 of Bill 229, have caused Council and its stakeholders considerable concern and alarm.

Any reasonable reading of the proposed legislation would see it as severely limiting the ability of CAs to carry out their historic roles and undermining decades of environmental stewardship in Ontario. It is their job to protect Ontario from floods, and prevent wetland destruction and loss of forests and other natural heritage features. CAs play a major role in protecting water quality

and quantity, facilitating access to nature and supporting agricultural productivity, while also addressing climate change and enhancing human health and prosperity. Integrated Watershed Management is an essential tool used by CAs to achieve these outcomes.

Council believes we should be protecting and expanding the great value of the CAs and not undermining their effectiveness. The proposed changes in Schedule 6 are unlikely to be good for public safety, the environment or speedier approvals.

Reducing red tape is a commendable objective but not at the expense of the very values Ontarians hold dear: ensuring our communities are safe and green. Conservation Authorities were established in response to the unhealthy state of land and water due to poor planning practices. Today, they bring a watershed perspective to planning and development decisions to ensure communities are built safely and meet current environmental protection standards.

We recommend that Schedule 6 of Bill 229 be removed entirely.

### Ministerial Zoning Orders

In our [July 31, 2020 letter #12](#) to you, Council highlighted its concern with the extraordinary increase in the use of MZOs.

MZOs have been used in the past to suspend other-wise required consultation and appeal processes where matters of significant provincial interest exist relating to proposed development that may be compromised through delay. They were never intended to become simply tools of convenience for moving developments through the planning process. They should be used sparingly and only in exceptional circumstances.

Excessive use of MZOs implies that the current provincial planning policy framework is not adequate to address the planning issues of the day. If that is the case, then it is government's responsibility to address and refine the framework. In fact, over the last two years, substantial changes have been made to the *Planning Act*, *Provincial Policy Statement*, and provincial plans, yet MZOs continue to be used.

Council has recommended that MZOs need to be accompanied by a public process that is fair and transparent. Detailed information relating to the development and a clear rationale as to why the MZO is being used should be publicly available. These measures are especially important when combined with the current intent to hobble the regulatory role of CAs.

Together these two government actions are contributing to a growing public concern that the end result will be a widening of the path of political influence on behalf of special interests.

We recommend that the government pause in the use of MZO's and engage in a public discussion on the principles, policies and procedures that would protect the public interest.

### Expanding the Greenbelt

Watershed planning underpins the Greenbelt and thus is a core building block for expanding the Greenbelt.

Council of course supports the government's stated interest in expanding the Greenbelt and would look forward to participating in a public discussion on the policies, proceedings and practices that would animate any expansion.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David Crombie". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "D" and "C".

David Crombie  
Chair, Greenbelt Council

#### Copies to:

The Honourable Jeff Yurek, Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks

The Honourable John Yakabuski, Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry

The Honourable Rod Phillips, Minister of Finance

Kate Manson-Smith, Deputy Minister

Greenbelt Council members

Ed McDonnell, CEO, Greenbelt Foundation

Greater Golden Horseshoe stakeholders