



Backgrounder

Concerns About Changes to the *Conservation Authorities Act* and *Planning Act* Which Affect Conservation Authorities

November 11, 2020

The Province has introduced a number of changes to the *Conservation Authorities Act* and the *Planning Act* that significantly either limit and completely change the role of conservation authorities to protect Ontario's environment and ensure people and property are safe from natural hazards. The changes risk watering down or limiting the conservation authorities' ability to ensure a watershed-based approach to development and to overall protection of Ontario's environment.

Highlights of Key Changes:

- remove and/or significantly hinder the conservation authorities' role in regulating development, permit and planning application appeal process and engaging in review and appeal of municipal planning applications
- allow the Minister make decisions on permit appeals and issue permits without watershed data and expertise from the conservation authorities
- redirect the fiduciary role (Duty of Members) for municipally appointed CA Board members. They are being told to make decisions in the best interest of the municipalities and not the conservation authority.

Conservation Authority Transparency and Accountability

There are a number of changes which appear administrative in nature which we acknowledge will address concerns around conservation authorities' transparency and accountability. CA Administrative By-Laws were completed by the December 2018 legislated deadline and should already address these concerns including making key documents publicly available; including meeting agendas, meeting minutes, and annual audits.

Conservation Ontario Concerns

Ontario's environment will be at risk.

Provincial changes to both the *Conservation Authorities Act* and the *Planning Act* risk watering down or losing the conservation authorities' science-based watershed approach which currently protects Ontario's environment.

- Conservation authorities are important agencies who help protect Ontario's environment. Their science-based watershed information helps to steer development to appropriate places where it will not harm the environment or create risks to people.
- CAs bring the watershed science and information to the various tables where development and growth are being reviewed and discussed.
- Provincial changes limit the conservation authorities' ability to provide input to municipal planning applications and to permit decisions and appeals.

- The conservation authority watershed model has served Ontario well and is relied upon by many levels of government, businesses and residents to protect the environment from upstream to downstream.
- Conservation authorities undertake watershed-scale monitoring, data collection management and modelling; watershed-scale studies, plans, assessments and strategies; and watershed-wide actions including stewardship, communication, outreach and education activities that protect our environment on a watershed basis.

Provincial changes will actually create more costs, delays and red tape around permit and planning applications and appeals.

- There are new appeal processes which will significantly slow down the permitting process creating delays and more red tape.
- If applicants are not satisfied with decisions made by the Hearing Boards (CA Board of Directors and/or Executive), then applicants can now appeal directly to the Minister who can make his or her own decision and even issue a permit.
- Alternatively, or in addition, the applicant can appeal a decision of the conservation authority to the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal (LPAT).
- These changes could add as many as almost 200 days to the application process.

Changes made by the Province to the conservation authorities' role in not being allowed to independently appeal decisions made around permits and municipal planning applications will put more people and infrastructure at risk of flooding and other natural hazards and add additional stressors to Ontario's biodiversity.

- Conservation authorities' regulatory role is not always a popular one but it is very important. Being able to participate in appeals processes ensures that the watershed lens is being applied to planning and land use decisions and that people and their property are protected from natural hazards such as flooding.
- Changes have been made to the conservation authorities' role in the permit appeal process. They are no longer allowed to appeal these decisions independently.
- Without our ability to look at development applications on a watershed basis, we run the risk of the plan review process being piecemealed and ultimately the potential to exasperate risks associated with natural hazards and for cumulative negative environmental impacts.

The Province has removed the responsibility for municipally appointed CA Board members to represent the interests of the Conservation Authority.

- The Province has changed the 'Duty to Members' section of the CAA to have municipal representatives on CA Boards actually act in the interests of their own municipality rather than the conservation authority's interests.
- It contradicts the fiduciary duty of board members of any organization to represent the best interests of the corporation they are overseeing. It puts an individual municipal interest above the conservation authority interests.

- This change undermines the ability of the CA Board to address the broader environmental/resource management issues facing our watersheds today. It limits discourse on these issues and consideration of programs and services that address watershed-wide issues that span municipal boundaries is paramount in a time of increasing climate change.

For more information:

Kim Gavine, General Manager, Conservation Ontario
Cell: 905-251-3268 | kgavine@conservationontario.ca
Conservationontario.ca