

Pave paradise, put up a parking lot

by BRIAN LOCKHART

If you are an urban dweller, you probably don't give a whole lot of thought about rural areas, wetlands, fields, floods, and wildlife.

Most people tend to focus on things close to home.

There are, of course, many suburbanites who take a real interest in nature and the environment. After all, we all share it no matter where you live.

When people take over a land mass, you have to take care of it because you are interfering with the natural process that takes place when trees grow, rivers flow, and a turtle needs a place to live.

The Conservation Authorities Act, in Ontario, was established in 1946, when it was realized that much of the renewable natural resources of the province were in an unhealthy state as a result of poor land, water and forestry practices during the 1930s and 1940s.

When Hurricane Hazel ravaged the province in 1954, it caused millions of dollars in damage as well as loss of life.

There are many dams and old mills across Ontario with a historic plaque that details how the dam was washed out during that storm.

I interviewed a local man who told me the story of coming out of his farmhouse as a kid, the day after the storm, and their entire lake had been drained. A friend of his family downstream spent two days in a tree waiting to be rescued.

That storm underscored the importance of the Conservation Authorities Act to protect lives and property.

The provincial government's proposed Bill 23 ? called the More Homes Built Faster Act ? calls for the building of 1.5 million more homes in Ontario over the next decade. That's an ambitious goal, but is it good for the province?

Bill 23, raises some serious questions about where these houses will be built and the process that is currently in place to keep development in check.

There are plans now to open up parts of the so-called ?green belt? to development. The green belt was put in place for a reason ? to keep it green, and protect environmentally sensitive areas and farmland.

If the green belt was so important when it was created, it must still be important today.

Bill 23, as proposed, would undermine Conservation Authorities' ability to control interference with rivers, creeks, and wetlands.

It would also pretty much eliminate a municipality's ability to have a say in its own growth, as it would remove requirements for public meetings on certain planning matters, and remove the people's right to appeal planning decisions.

The Ministry of Environment would have the power to override municipal planning decisions.

In short, the Bill would give developers a pretty free hand to build where they want, with little input from other sources including local government, residents, and Conservation Authorities.

The Bill also has very little respect for designated heritage properties that may be bulldozed to build another 20 townhomes jammed

together like ant colonies.

The Bill will exempt developers from developer charges, which municipalities use to meet critical infrastructure needs. This means they will have no real obligation to build the 'affordable housing' that people are calling for.

There's a whole list of other considerations in this Bill that should be closely examined by the public.

We definitely have a housing problem in the province right now. There are plenty of younger people who cannot buy a house in their own hometown due to rising housing costs.

We can only fit so many people into the number of available houses, and yet the federal government is planning on bringing in over 400,000 immigrants over the course of a year.

Do the math here, and you can easily find the problem. People have to live somewhere, but being pushed out of your own hometown because too many people have moved the housing market above your ability to afford a home does not serve the public well.

Just building massive developments is not the solution ? especially when the province is calling for 'intensification' in a society that relies on automobiles. Whether you like it or not, automobiles are a necessity for most people across the province.

New neighbourhoods are jammed with cars parked on the streets because when a family grows, so does its need to have more than one spot to park a car, even though you paid over \$1 million for your home.

Bill 23 needs some serious opposition before the long-term effects are realized and we all pay the eventual price.