

County Council requesting changes to conservation authority working group

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Dufferin County Council is asking the Province to reassess the makeup of the conservation authority working group, launched by the Ontario government following the passing of Bill 229.

During County Council's meeting last Thursday (Jan. 14), Amaranth Deputy Mayor Chris Gerrits brought forward a motion requesting that the province reevaluate the working group to allow for equal representation from municipalities and conservation authorities.

"I found yesterday the list of appointees and I was disappointed to see that it's primarily CAOs of conservation authorities, with only one representative out of 18 representing municipality," said Gerrits.

The Conservation Authority Working Group was established by the provincial government following the passing of Bill 229, which received Royal Assent on Dec. 8 and saw controversial changes to Schedule 6 of the Conservation Authorities Act (CAA).

Prior to its passing, conservation authorities and municipalities said the legislation would limit conservation authorities and streamline the development process. Some revision and amendments were made such as allowing conservation authorities to issue stop orders while concerns such as the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry having the ability to make decision on appeals and issuing permits without expertise from conservation authorities.

Gerrits, speaking with the Free Press, explained his concerns with the majority of appointees on the working group being conservation authorities, with only one representative from municipalities.

"My issue with it is that it's supposed to be a working group to sort of advise on proposed changes and the fact is that municipalities are the major source of funding for the Conservation Authority," said Gerrits. "So the recommendations that come out of the working group have the potential to be adopted by the provincial government, with the implication being that any costs associated with improvements or enhancements or any additional scope, which I don't think would happen, but it is possible to have direct impact on those municipalities because they're responsible for those costs."

Discussing the motion, Mulmur Mayor Janet Horner questioned a change in the wording, to have additional municipal representation rather than equal, noting that she too believes that one municipal representative is not enough.

With 18 members already part of the conservation authority working group, Gerrits did consider how the working group could cause a higher number of group members, but chose to continue to the original working of the motion.

With the passing of the motion it will also be sent to the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO), Minister of Environment, Conservation and Parks Jeff Yurek, and Hassaan Basil, chair of the conservation authority working group.