

Hill, Wynne correspondence less than cordial

In what reads like a polite rebuke to Premier Kathleen Wynne in response to the premier's letters in which she implied in essence that she would be too busy to listen to concerns that could be taken to the ministry of environment, Melancthon Mayor and county Warden Bill Hill says wind-farm developers have become 'bullies' since passage of the Green Energy Act.

'While I am writing this letter as Mayor of the Township of Melancthon, I would like to share the following. I was acclaimed as Warden of Dufferin County in December, 2013.

I attended my first Western Wardens Congress in January. As I went around meeting others, the turbine topic came up. Everyone said the same thing, since the introduction of the Green Energy and Economy Act, Developers have become bullies, unreasonable, threatening and just downright nasty. Your law allows that to happen.

'You have taken away any MEANINGFUL avenue for LEGITIMATE concerns to be heard and acted on. While I realize you can't legislate good behavior or good business practice, it is important to realize these companies will be members of our community for up to 45 years. It is sad,' Mayor Hill says in his letter.

It might have been unnecessary for the mayor to tell the premier that he is also the warden of Dufferin, as her office would or should have known.

However, the premier's letter writer had been a bit condescending in the letter to the mayor.

'As you may be aware,' one paragraph in the premier's letter begins, 'the Ministry of the Environment (MOE) completed the review of the REA application for the Dufferin Wind Project on June 10, 2013.

'The Environmental Review Tribunal also recently made a decision on December 23, 2013, to dismiss the appeals raised,' it continues, and then goes on:

'If you have any further concerns, incidents to report, or any complaints about the construction or operation of the wind facility, please contact your local District or Area Office of the MOE. 'The Guelph District Office is the contact for the Dufferin Wind project and for other projects in the Melancthon and Amaranth areas. The Guelph District Office can be reached by calling 519-826-4255 or toll-free at 1-800-265-8658,' the premier's letter urges, as though the contact should be news to the township. Mayor Hill points out that the municipality had already been in touch with various ministries but had had no co-operation from them.

The premier goes on to say that she welcomes discussion, and that there'll be a new formula for renewable energy projects.

'As Premier, I am committed to ensuring an improved process for future renewable energy projects, and your input and experience is invaluable. As you may be aware, the Ontario Power Authority is developing a new competitive procurement process for future large renewable energy 'projects that will include substantial engagement with the public, municipalities and Aboriginal communities on appropriate locations and siting requirements.

'The new process for large renewable energy projects is expected to be launched in early 2014,' the premier's letter says.

In response, Mayor Hill said the Ontario Energy Board had disregarded public and municipal representations in granting Dufferin Wind Power the Leave to Construct the 230kv power line on the county-owned rail corridor.

He said the ERT also dismissed all appellant submissions to the hearing that upheld the approval of the wind farm and transmission line.

(Dennis Sanford and CORE are seeking a judicial review of the decision.)

'Your Government continually promotes the 'consultation process' built into the Green Energy and Economy Act. Your Government continues to extol the benefits of the 'new and improved' process to be launched in early 2014.'

'The point your Government continues to miss or ignore, is that your law allows developers to bully, threaten and ignore reasonable requests from elected officials or concerned citizens.

'Proponents must 'hear' what people have to say but they don't need to listen,' Mayor Hill said in his response.

As county warden, Mayor Hill is also faced with resolving an easement issue with the corridor power line. Dufferin Wind Power has applied for permission to expropriate the required easement, and the preliminary hearing has been set for Feb. 18.

'If an agreement is not finalized by Feb. 18, 2014 expropriation of the right of way of the 32 km public trail will begin.' He said he had 'worked with three developments, without incident. Many of our citizens were/are not pleased that we did that.

'Through that process, however, we did learn things that were really required to appease people and move the project forward. Your Government's Law changed that.'

By Wes Keller