

NDACT: ?Stopping Bill 66 is as important as stopping Mega Quarry?

Written By **MARNI WALSH**

On December 13th, just one week after the public posting of the Province's proposed Bill 66, the North Dufferin Agricultural and Community Taskforce (NDACT) met to review the bill and its impacts in order to submit comments to the provincial government by the January 20th deadline.

The Provincial Conservative Party has proposed MMAH/Planning Act changes in Bill 66, named ?Restoring Ontario's Competitiveness Act,? which allow municipalities, with ministerial approval, to pass ?Open For Business? bylaws permitting them to exclude requirements for public notice or public meetings. These decisions, made by municipal governments, could not be appealed at the Local Planning Appeals Tribunal.

Sounding the alarm, NDACT, and other environmental action organizations such as Environmental Defence, want the public to be aware that, ?The legislation exempts municipalities from complying with portions of the Clean Water Act, Greenbelt Act, the Planning Act, Lake Simcoe Protection Act, Great Lakes Protection Act, the Provincial Policy Statement, key sections of the Planning Act and other environmental legislation implemented over the last 30 years.?

?The argument that Bill 66 and the Open for Business by-law will to make it easier to designate lands that are currently protected for new business and industry does not make good economic sense,? states NDACT. ?For years the province has forced municipalities to look at and ensure employment lands are located within an urban or town boundary close to infrastructure that can support businesses such as water, sewers, internet and a good road network. Allowing employment uses anywhere in the province, as the Open for Business by-law would, will put a huge burden on municipalities and utilities to provide services and upgrade roads in addition to the potential loss of farmland, and environmental impacts. These services are expensive and building them will cause property tax increases and make it even harder to build public transit.?

In a 2017 two-part brief titled ?The Growth Plan and the Greenbelt Plan Setting the Record Straight,? expert planner Victor Doyle stated: ?The claims that the plans are constraining the supply of land and ground-related housing are ill-founded.? His findings supported no demand or need for new lands to be designated for ?business? on the Greenbelt, in the Lake Simcoe watershed or on the Oak Ridges Moraine, but rather, that municipalities should make use of surplus employment lands in towns and cities across the region.

NDACT's mandate is to protect local resources and communities, ?The health of our region depends on valuing our farms, forests, clean water sources and nature, and building robust and vibrant communities,? says the grassroots organization. It is clear that the proposed Bill 66 does not adequately allow for this.

NDACT's new Chair, Karren Wallace, was a major force in the battle to save local farmland and source water from the (American hedge fund backed) Highland Companies' proposed Mega Quarry which was defeated in 2012. She told the Free Press, that although NDACT is supportive of the goal of streamlining and reducing red tape for businesses to operate in Ontario, the proposed amendment to the Planning Act in Bill 66 takes away the democratic right of citizens to know what is happening in their own backyard, provide input, and if needed oppose the development. ?Transparency is a key and fundamental issue that is missing from Bill 66,? says Ms. Wallace. ?Profits for corporations should not come before the rights of the taxpayers, their health or the environment.?

Ms. Wallace capsulates the serious implications of Bill 66, ?In the Mega Quarry Battle, due to the legislative requirements for public notice, public meetings and various applications the Highlands Companies was required to submit, the North Dufferin and Community Agricultural Taskforce (NDACT) was able to bring the facts to the public's attention resulting in public opposition to the proposal, eventually proving the implications of the proposal would be catastrophic. If Bill 66 were in place in 2011, the company could have approached and received Council approval, fast tracked rezoning without notice to the public and no

mechanism to appeal the decision.?

NDACT's Chair says the organizations short term goal is to raise public awareness about the implications of the Provinces proposed Bill 66. ?Stopping or amending Bill 66 in its current form is every bit as important as stopping the Mega Quarry,? says Ms. Wallace. ?Transparency is a fundamental right of democracy and this Bill, if passed would remove that.?

Public comments on Bill 66 are required before the January 20th deadline. NDACT calls on residents to comment in writing, by email and on-line if possible. The Province has transitioned from a previous Environmental Bill Registry, and now all comments must be submitted on the new site. The ERO number must be submitted with the comments. ERO-013-4293 Bill 66, Restoring Ontario's Competitiveness Act, 2018. For a summary follow this link: <https://ero.ontario.ca/notice/013-4293>. (It is advisable to keep a copy of your submission.) By email to: PlanningConsultation@ontario.ca ;

On-Line: follow this link: <https://ero.ontario.ca/notice/013-4293>; In writing to:

Michael Helfinger, Intergovernmental Policy Coordination Unit, 900 Bay Street, Hearst Block, 7th Floor, Toronto ON M6H 4L1.

Long Term, NDACT hopes to raise awareness of the importance of protecting and expanding the Greenbelt. NDACT is attending a session by Environmental Defence in Ajax on January 12th and will be conducting delegations on Bill 66 to Councils in Dufferin County in the coming weeks.