

2,000 attend anti-NEC rally in Orangeville

By WES KELLER
Special to The Herald

An estimated 2,000 persons at Orangeville Wednesday gave standing ovations to 14 speakers who told them their fight against the Niagara Escarpment Commission was just beginning.

Premier William Davis, invited to attend the rally, sent a letter by courier in which he expressed the concern of the

government for the rights of affected ratepayers.

Mr. Davis, who was represented at the rally by Jack Johnson, of Wellington-Dufferin-Peel, asked the ratepayers to be patient and to await the results of a forthcoming NEC report.

According to Mr. Davis' letter, NEC is to report to the cabinet "within the next few days" and final decisions are

where the escarpment is exposed; about 3,000 acres. In Mulmur Township, there are Provincial parks on the Boyne River and on the Pine River. People have access to the escarpment for skiing at Blue Mountains, he says.

There are many other parks or provincially owned lands containing many thousands of acres through the Niagara

Escarpment Planning Area where people can hike, fish, enjoy the scenery and nature.

Bill 129 gives the government power to expropriate an owners land or part of it to establish a Bruce Trail route. This power is unnecessary. The Bruce Trail Association has great success in making arrangements with private property owners for a trailway, says Shepherd.

Philosophy, thinking wrong

The preliminary proposals of the Niagara Escarpment Commission (NEC) represent the basic thinking and philosophy of the commission, and that is why the concept is wrong says George Shepherd of Shelburne.

Mr. Shepherd, a lawyer and the president of the Niagara Escarpment Central Ratepayers Association (NECRA), was responding to a recent report that NEC chairman Iver McMullin had said he would reduce the size of the NEC planning area.

"The commission doesn't have the authority to change the escarpment planning area," said Mr. Shepherd. "Only the legislature can effect such a change."

Mr. Shepherd said the commission should have held public meetings before drafting its preliminary proposals.

"They (NEC) should have had advance input and feedback from the residents," he said.

Mr. McMullin was quoted by a Toronto newspaper as saying he had been "getting pressure from all sides to reduce the area," and Mr. Shepherd questioned whether there would have been pressure to make changes if the public had been consulted before the proposals were put forth.

According to Mr. Shepherd, most of the involved land is farming land, and the people on the land make their livings from areas that NEC wants to designate for recreational use.

He described the planning of NEC as being "out of step" with the needs of the people who make their living from the land and said this was a clear demonstration that local development control shouldn't be vested in an appointed body.

He said appointed bodies couldn't be expected to understand local problems.

"NEC isn't responsive to the people and it isn't accessible to the landowners," he said.

Mr. Shepherd charged that NEC had failed to honor its mandate to take into account the social and economic problems of the area.

Mr. Shepherd's group wants the commission disbanded and development control of the escarpment returned to local elected representatives.

The group has said that there are already enough government departments to administer the escarpment without creating "a new bureaucracy."

About 2,000 ratepayers attended a rally of NECRA at Orangeville Raceway Wednesday night.

Bus trip to support MPP's bill

Niagara Escarpment Central Ratepayers Association is offering a bus trip to Queen's Park May 11 for members of the public to hear a debate to restrict the powers of the Niagara Escarpment Commission.

The debate centres around a private member's bill introduced by Robert McKeessock, MPP (L-Grey).

The bus trip was announced at a public rally sponsored by NECRA Wednesday at Orangeville Raceway.

Tickets for the trip are selling for \$3, and are available from members of NECRA.

Mr. McKeessock addressed the rally Wednesday and urged residents to attend the debate because he said only 10 of Ontario's MPPs represent constituents who live or have land on the escarpment control area.

The bus will leave Orangeville Raceway at 10 a.m. May 11.

Farmers 'harassed' by NEC: OFA

Farmers in the Niagara Escarpment area are being harassed by the Niagara Escarpment Commission, says Ontario Federation of Agriculture president Peter Hannam of Guelph.

Mr. Hannam made the statement at the rally sponsored by the Niagara Escarpment Central Ratepayers Association (NECRA) at the Orangeville Raceway Wednesday.

He was one of more than a dozen speakers who said they were concerned about loss of individual property rights because of NEC controls and about the "excessive amounts" of land coming under the controls.

Mr. Hannam praised the efforts of NECRA members and said people living in the escarpment area needed to have a common voice in what

was described as "just the beginning" of the fight against NEC.

Other speakers at the rally were overwhelmingly in favor of having NEC disbanded and the Niagara Escarpment Planning Act (Bill 129) rescinded.

One speaker, Robert McKeessock MPP (L-Grey), urged the audience to go to Queen's Park May 11 to hear debates on a private member's bill designed to limit the powers of NEC.

Mr. McKeessock said he had been trying to have the Act abolished for about the past two or three years but pointed out that only 10 MPPs are affected by NEC and there isn't much support for abolition.

Mr. McKeessock said his bill should effectively protect the rights of landowners, but at

least one farmer said he didn't agree.

Len Watt, of Nottawasaga Township said he thought the McKeessock bill was "a lot of nothing" because it left NEC "still feeding on the taxpayers of the province."

Mr. Watt told the meeting "Canadians can't afford such flagrant violation of rights" as NEC controls.

He cited the controls as an example of why people are taking their money out of Canada and said the Ontario government would "no longer be worthy of our support" if it permitted the NEC proposals to become law.

As a farmer, Mr. Watt said, he felt that "city people" were asking farmers to "supply free recreation" by seeking to place farmlands under the control of NEC.

Naturalists support need to control escarpment

Not everyone is opposed to having the Niagara Escarpment Commission (NEC) control of land use along the escarpment, says a member of the Federation of Ontario Naturalists (FON).

Mike Singleton of Don Mills, representing FON, was interviewed after a rally of the Niagara Escarpment Central Ratepayers Association (NECRA) at Orangeville Raceway Wednesday.

Mr. Singleton said his 12,000 member association would like to see an "essentially continuous natural belt" retained

along the escarpment.

He said, however, the natural belt should be created without depriving landowners the right to control access to their land.

Controls of development, he said, would ensure the preservation of natural values of the land and he suggested that would be to the benefit of the landowners.

He said most people bought land on the escarpment because of the natural beauty, and the proposed controls would "preserve the values for which they had bought."

Mr. Singleton said he thought the controls now being imposed by NEC would "ultimately" be returned to the municipalities "within a planning framework."

Only one of the estimated 2,000 persons at the rally voiced criticism of the format of the meeting.

In a question period which followed the speeches, an unidentified man said he had heard a succession of arguments against NEC voiced by landowners, lawyers and politicians and he asked why no one had spoken in favor of NEC.

NECRA president George Shepherd responded that NEC chairman Iver McMullin had been invited to the rally but hadn't consented to attend.

Proposals only preliminary: MPP

Preliminary proposals of the Niagara Escarpment Commission are just that, says Jack Johnson, MPP (PC, Wellington-Dufferin-Peel), and affected landowners shouldn't be upset until the government has dealt with the final legislation.

Mr. Johnson, one of more than a dozen speakers at Wednesday's Orangeville rally of the Niagara Escarpment Central Ratepayers Association, was the only government member to address the gathering of an estimated 2,000.

"Some people said I wouldn't have the guts to show up at this meeting," Mr. Johnson told the crowd which during the night had been giving standing ovations to every speaker who criticized the government and the general aims of NEC.

Mr. Johnson said he came to the meeting to convey the concern of the government for the problems of escarpment landowners.

He said the preliminary proposals were published only so NEC could get the reaction of the people to the proposals and assured the gathering the concerns of the people would be taken into account before the final proposals were drafted into law.

Mr. Johnson denied that the preliminary proposals were

entirely bad, and said they were "often compatible" with local town planning.

However, Eddie Sargent, MPP (L-Grey-Bruce) didn't agree with Mr. Johnson.

"I have never seen so much injustice and dictatorship as the NEC," Mr. Sargent said.

Mr. Sargent told the crowd that the province has taken control of about \$1.3 billion of land without compensating the owners for their loss of rights.

He said it seemed appropriate that the rally against NEC was being held at a race track.

"Most people lose money at the race track," he said.

"But if you live in the escarpment area you don't have to go to the races to get cleaned out or lose your shirt," he said.

Mr. Sargent was cheered when he called for abolition of NEC, and booed when he suggested the alternative of appointing a Royal Commission to investigate NEC.

Another Liberal MPP, Robert McKeessock of Grey, told the meeting his private member's bill to reduce the powers of NEC would mean a hard fight in the legislature because "only 10" members of the legislature represent areas that are affected by NEC planning.



PRACTICING

Betty Woods, a Grade 11 student at Georgetown district high school, practices with the school band in preparation for an Arts Festival which the school is presenting next Wednesday and Thursday evenings. Music, art, a satirical revue and a fashion show are all included in the event.

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<p>HALTON HILLS PENTECOSTAL ASSEMBLY Trafalgar Rd. and No. 7 Highway Pastor Rev. E.J. Friesen Sunday, May 14 Mother's Day Service 10 a.m. until 11:30 a.m. 7 p.m. Water Baptismal Service Music Directors Dave & Shannon Pringle Tuesdays 7:00 p.m. Pioneer Girls Boys Brigade 30 Mid week Prayer & Bible Study</p>	<p>IMMANGEL LUTHERAN CHURCH Windsor Road at Carole St. Rev. Harold R. Patzer Sunday, May 14 9:45 Sunday School 11:00 a.m. Worship Service Church of the Lutheran Hour</p> <p>MAPLE AVENUE BAPTIST CHURCH 177 Maple Ave. Georgetown Dr. E.S. Kerr Pastor Sunday, May 14 9:45 Sunday School 11 a.m. Dr. E.S. Kerr 6:30 p.m. Rev. T.E. Dow Kilchener 11:15-15 Sunday School Special Speaker for the deaf Something Special for Mother</p>

Petition to disband NEC

While one MPP is mustering support for a private member's bill to limit the powers of Niagara Escarpment Commission (NEC) another has tabled a petition in the Ontario legislature calling for the dissolution of NEC.

A ratepayers' association, Niagara Escarpment Central Ratepayers Association (NECRA), Wednesday called for the disbanding of NEC and on the same day, Eddie Sargent, (MPP L-Grey-Bruce) was reported as saying he had tabled the petition.

According to the report, Mr. Sargent said the petition contained thousands of names from residents of Grey and Bruce counties.

Mr. Sargent told NECRA rally at Orangeville Wednesday that 75 per cent of the escarpment was in the two counties.

The private member's bill, already circulated by Robert McKeessock, MPP (L-Grey), is being debated in the legislature May 11.

The bill provides for a reduction from the now-controlled 1.3 million acres and further provides that the government would have to buy any currently-existing lots for which it refused a development permit.

NECRA has arranged chartered buses to Queen's Park for the debate and a strong contingent of members is expected to attend.

See additional stories pages 6 and 26

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