

HALTON MAYORS FIRE BACK ON CONSERVATION AUTHORITY CHANGES

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Halton's mayors and regional chair have come back swinging at the province in response to its recent request for conservation authorities to wind down programs deemed unrelated to their core mandate.

The five local heads of council and the Conservation Halton (CH) board of directors chair recently teamed up to send a letter that urges the Ford government to hold "meaningful" consultations with conservation authorities to discuss regulations and define core programs.

"We strongly recommend engaging in pre-consultations with Conservation Halton and other CAs to ensure we are working together to define the governing regulations and to

THE ISSUE:
POTENTIAL CONSERVATION AUTHORITY PROGRAM CLOSURES.

LOCAL IMPACT:
CONSERVATION HALTON SAY THE PROVINCE'S REQUEST TO WIND DOWN PROGRAMS UNRELATED TO ITS CORE MANDATE COULD RESULT IN MASSIVE LOSSES OF JOBS AND REVENUE.

continue our long-standing partnership," reads the letter.

The move comes in response to a letter Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks Jeff



Torstar file photo

The mayors of Burlington Marianne Meed Ward, Rick Bonnette of Halton Hills, Rob Burton of Oakville and Gord Krantz of Milton, along with Regional Chair Gary Carr, have written to the Province demanding consultations on changes to conservation authority regulations.

Yurek circulated last month to conservation authorities asking them to review their activities and begin preparations to wind down activities that fall outside the scope of their core mandates.

At the time, Conservation Halton chief administrative officer Hassaan Basit deemed the letter "a bit of a blindside," as conservation authorities have been in talks with the government since changes

were made to the Conservation Authorities Act earlier this year.

The recent letter penned by CH and the local politicians to the province details the losses that would be felt if the local authority had to close its programs.

"Conservation Halton employs approximately 800 seasonal workers, mostly youth, and supports local businesses and tourism. These 800 jobs are at risk

with the apparent direction of the province," it states.

"Furthermore, CH attracts 1.2 million visitors annually; that would be 1.2 million disappointments should CH lose its ability to manage these cherished assets."

The letter also highlights the fact that CH uses no tax dollars to manage and operate its conservation areas, which actually generate a surplus that offsets "significant costs" that would otherwise be funded through municipal tax levies.

"Municipalities have no desire to take over these responsibilities," it adds.

Along with the letter, the political leaders sent a

discussion paper that reiterates the importance of consulting with conservation authorities prior to consulting all stakeholders about the regulations being crafted by the province.

"We feel strongly that through these pre-consultations we can help the province gain a clear understanding of what CAs do, and we can assist the provincial government in fulfilling its commitment to Ontarians," it reads.

"We believe that the Conservation Halton Board and participating municipalities should be allowed the time to consider the full implications to their watersheds before reducing any programs or freezing fees and levies."

STORY BEHIND THE STORY:

With this provincial directive potentially impacting local residents' jobs and taxes, we continue to keep a close eye on how the issue is resolved.

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