

Large protest against proposed Highway 413 held in Bolton

Harvest Ontario Walk to Stop the 413 held in memory of Jenni Le Forestier

By ZACHARY ROMAN

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Resistance in Caledon to the proposed Highway 413 isn't going away.

On October 14, a large rally against the highway was held in Bolton. That morning, two groups of demonstrators gathered: one at the Caledon Centre for Recreation and Wellness on Bolton's north hill, and one at the Albion Bolton Community Centre on Bolton's south hill.

The groups then marched down the hills, met for a rally at Bolton Mill Park, and continued on to the intersection of King and Queen streets to demonstrate their opposition to the 413 to passing traffic.

The protest, called the Harvest Ontario Walk to Stop the 413, was held in memory of Caledon resident and environmental activist Jenni Le Forestier, who passed away in 2022. Le Forestier was a prominent figure in the fight to stop the highway.

The walk was organized by EcoCaledon, Environmental Defence, Grandmothers Act to Save the Planet (GASP) and Seniors for Climate Action.

Carole Holmes, co-chair of GASP, said her group is particularly concerned about leaving a better world for their grandchildren.

"We acknowledge that we were part of the problem? using all the energy we wanted? and that we were in fact destroying the planet," said Holmes. "That really affects grandmothers because we care about our grandkids; this is their health, their future."

Holmes said the proposed 413 is a bad idea because it will create more sprawl and pave over valuable farmland and environmentally sensitive areas.

"We've got so much to do, that's why we're here today," said Holmes.

Caledon resident Dan O'Reilly, who helped organize the protest, said he was quite happy with the turnout. He estimated there were around 300 people participating.

"It says that people are opposed to (the 413) other than developers and Doug Ford's friends," said O'Reilly. "We've got to keep the momentum going. We won the battle of the Greenbelt, but we've also got to win this battle."

He said those in opposition to the 413 should contact Dufferin-Caledon MPP Sylvia Jones and let her know their stance.

O'Reilly spoke of Le Forestier at the protest. He said she was a remarkable individual; an amazing music teacher and mother who still found the time to fight against the 413, protect the Greenbelt, and stop pits and quarries.

Le Forestier's mother, Janine, and daughter, Josephine were at the protest.

Janine said she was amazed to see the event being held in Jenni's honour.

"She was the best daughter, best mum. She would be overwhelmed by today in memory of her," said Janine. "Thank you. We have a

big fight ahead of us still.?

The leader of the Green Party of Ontario, Mike Schreiner, attended the protest.

?Each and every one of you gives me the strength to carry on,? he said to the crowd. ?It's your relentless tenacity and tireless hard work that led to Doug Ford finally backing down on his plan to open the Greenbelt for development.?

Schreiner said people need to continue to stand up and protect farmland, wetlands and forests. He said if people keep fighting they will win the battle against the 413.

?People are going to tell you the 413 is a done deal? Doug Ford is going to try to tell you that they have a mandate to build the 413,? said Schreiner. ?Well, six months ago they said the exact same thing about the Greenbelt.?

Matt Lie-Paehlke of Environmental Defence said the 413 would be both extremely expensive and ineffective.

?It's going to pave 400 acres of the Greenbelt and 2,000 acres of our best farmland, as well as drive sprawl to pave over even more important land in the area,? said Lie-Paehlke, noting the highway would threaten species at risk too.

Lie-Paehlke said people need to put pressure on their local MPPs and let them know their opposition to the highway.

Ward 3 Councillor Doug Maskell attended the protest. He said when he was campaigning to be elected, one of the things he said he'd do is try and stop the 413.

?Ward 3, which I represent, is going to be disproportionately affected by the 413,? said Maskell. ?A large segment would go right across the bottom of Ward 3.?