

# Local groups to host rally opposing Bills 5 and 17 on Saturday

By **Riley Murphy**

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On Thursday, June 5, Royal Assent was granted to both Bill 5, the Protect Ontario by Unleashing our Economy Act, and Bill 17, the Protect Ontario by Building Faster and Smarter Act.

Local groups, including ecoCaledon, GASP, and HeadwatersStopThe413, are conducting a rally on July 12 to advocate for the repeal of these bills.

According to organizers, the event encourages people to 'Say No' to reducing protection for endangered species, a two-tier legal system, special economic zones, ignoring prior informed consent from Indigenous communities, and curbing municipal input and climate action by negating Green Development Standards.

John MacRae and Betty de Groot are part of one of the groups organizing the rally, ecoCaledon.

They voiced some of the main concerns that stand with these two bills.

'In terms of Bill 5, the major egregious items are the First Nations' lack of free, prior and informed consent, as well as these special economic zones are a threat to any location within Ontario. None of us are kind of safe from that,' said de Groot.

According to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, Bill 17 includes that the council of a municipality or the planning board must obtain the Minister's approval before

making certain amendments to an Official Plan.

MacRae explained these municipalities drafted their Official Plans for a reason.

'All the different municipalities across Ontario have developed their own Official Plans in the last 10 to 15 years. They put a lot of time into this, and it's to have smart, non-sprawling development. Municipalities want to grow, and they've plugged into that with the province, but they want it to be sort of in a sustainable way so it isn't all over the place,' explained MacRae.

Another concern de Groot voiced is the lack of democracy that comes with these bills.

'There's not really any discussion required, not even necessarily that they publicize what they're signing off on. It takes democracy away from regular Ontarians. We don't get to be part of any kind of consultation, especially Indigenous people don't get any consultation once they declare a special economic zone,' said de Groot.

Part of the rally is to gain attention Dufferin-Caledon MPP Sylvia Jones and Premier Doug Ford.

Regarding the rally, Jones shared in a statement to the Citizen that the Government has taken 'real action to make Ontario the most competitive and resilient economy in the G7.'

'It shouldn't take upwards of 15 years to open a mine. These substantial delays hold back jobs, investment, and our ability to compete globally. Through Bill 5, the Protect Ontario by Unleashing Our Economy Act, our 'One Project, One Process' framework will reduce delays, cut red tape, and accelerate critical projects. We are also strengthening environmental enforcement while introducing tougher penalties and quadrupling conservation funding to \$20 million annually and reaffirming our commitment to

work in true partnership with Indigenous communities to progress major development opportunities,? said Jones.

Regarding Bill 17, she said the government is accelerating housing and infrastructure development by streamlining approvals, lowering costs, and equipping municipalities with the tools they need to build more homes.

?Through the Protect Ontario by Building Faster and Smarter Act, we're acting decisively to build more homes, faster. The 2025 Budget includes \$2.3 billion to help municipalities build essential infrastructure, with \$400 million in additional funding for the Municipal Housing Infrastructure Program and the Housing-Enabling Water Systems Fund, enabling up to 107,000 new homes across Ontario and driving significant progress toward addressing the housing needs of our province. These pieces of legislation are part of our government's ongoing plan to protect Ontario's workers, businesses, and communities, while harnessing the province's full economic potential.?

MacRae and de Groot said the rally is a chance to raise awareness in all ways.

?It's to show that people aren't happy about it, because it seems like across any political stripe, people are quite upset about Bill 5 and Bill 17 and how extreme it is,? said MacRae.

They added if the Bills are repealed, they are hoping to see the right kind of consultation before the next proposal.

At the rally, speakers will include Mike Schreiner, Ontario Green Party Leader and MPP, Debbe Crandall from Democracy Caledon, Bill Morrison, an Elder in the community, Shelburne Councillor Len Guchadi, and more.

The rally will begin at Mill Square Park in Orangeville and conclude at the office of Sylvia Jones.

MacRae and de Groot estimate that the rally will last from about 1 pm to 2:30 pm, and encourage everyone to come out and support.

?Bring a noisemaker, bring a sign, and bring a friend. We want people to not just come on their own, but bring somebody along,? said de Groot.