

Rally against Bill 212 to be held in Orangeville this Thursday

By **ZACHARY ROMAN**

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

A local citizens' group is holding a rally against the Province's recently-introduced legislation, Bill 212.

The rally, organized by Headwaters Stops the 413, will be held at 12 noon on November 22 outside Dufferin-Caledon MPP Sylvia Jones' office at 180 Broadway Street in Orangeville.

The non-profit Environmental Defence is supporting the rally and sending a speaker to it.

Bill 212 is the Reducing Gridlock, Saving You Time Act, and includes the Building Highways Faster and Highway 413 acts.

Among other things, Bill 212 exempts Highway 413 from the Environmental Assessment Act and removes certain rights of landowners whose properties would be expropriated to build the highway ? such as their ability to apply for an adjustment to the day their property would be expropriated.

Sharon Sommerville, a volunteer with Headwaters Stops the 413, said there's deeply-frightening anti-democratic items in Bill 212 to make sure the 413 gets built.

?It illustrates a deep disregard for procedures built up over decades to protect things like species at risk,? said Sommerville.

She said one major thing she doesn't like about Bill 212 is that it gives the Province the power to keep studies and reports about cultural and natural heritage sites it deems to be sensitive completely secret.

?It gives the Province so much power,? she said, adding that the bill, at its heart, allows the Province to do what it wants when it comes to the 413.

Somerville is a proponent of alternative ideas to reduce gridlock, such as allowing transport trucks to use the existing Highway 407 toll-free. She said this would reduce gridlock instantly without costing taxpayers billions of dollars and disrupting environmentally sensitive areas and farmland.

?We don't need the 413 and therefore we don't need Bill 212,? said Sommerville. ?We want (the Province) to protect our environment, invest in more public transit, and be fiscally responsible.?

Sommerville said if people can't make the November 22 rally and are in opposition to Bill 212, they should call or email Sylvia Jones' office to share their thoughts.

?Make your voice heard,? said Sommerville.

In an October 21 news release, the Province said Bill 212 will ?get shovels in the ground faster on Highway 413 and save drivers up to \$72 million.?

Minister of Transportation Prabmeet Sarkaria was quoted in the release.

?With this proposed legislation, we're also speeding up approvals on early works for Highway 413 so we can get shovels in the ground as soon as possible,? said Sarkaria.

On November 12, Caledon Councillors unanimously voted to share their opposition to Bill 212 with the Province.

Mayor Annette Groves said Bill 212 seems heavy-handed and that the Province dropped the ball by introducing the bill.