

The schedule 6 shell game

OUR READERS WRITE

Bill 229 was moved into a Standing Committee Nov. 23 for further discussion before going on to final reading.

For those who missed it, cleverly hidden in this Bill, titled "Protect, Support and Recover from COVID-19 Act" (Budget Measures), 2020, are several schedules including Schedule 6. It appears one of the things the Ford government wants to protect as we "recover" from COVID-19 is the right of developers to access areas currently protected by Ontario's Conservation Authorities.

Rod Phillips, the current Minister of Finance, and MPP Sylvia Jones, are defending Bill 229 and Schedule 6. When informed of our desire to have Schedule 6 removed from this budget bill, Ms. Jones sent a form letter defending the government's position and concluded with:

"In the coming weeks, the ministry will be consulting further on the regulatory proposals, including mandatory programs and services CAs must provide and the regulation outlining the agreements between CAs and municipalities.

"Thank you again for sharing your views on this important matter. I would encourage you to participate in the public consultation process."

Well, MPP Jones, I have consulted with many experts on ecological science, law and conservation education from the Canadian Environmental Law Association to Conservation Ontario to Environmental Defense to the Lake Simcoe Coalition.

They say you are spin doctoring.

Conservation Ontario (CO) recommends the Province of Ontario immediately remove Schedule 6, which amends the Conservation Authorities Act and the Planning Act, from the proposed changes contained in Bill 229: Protect, Support, and Recover from COVID 19 Act (Budget Measures Act) because it will: Create more red tape and higher costs for Ontario taxpayers; Threaten the independent watershed-based approach used by conservation authorities (CAs) in land use planning; Potentially add significant delays and costs in conservation authority enforcement, planning, and permitting processes; Potentially have significant impacts on Ontario's ability to cost-effectively provide natural hazards management/protection and drinking water protection.

Environmental Defence says that Schedule 6 "will take away any control over the protection of our precious wetlands, forests, wildlife habitat and natural spaces from Conservation Authorities and give huge new powers to developers to push through destructive projects. Worse, by sneaking through these changes buried in a budget bill, the government is avoiding the public consultation that is normally required on laws that impact the environment."

The Canadian Environmental Law Association says: "In CELA's view, the proposed changes to conservation authorities in Bill 229 will not achieve the crucially important goal of building climate resilience for Ontario. To the contrary, the package of amendments as proposed are likely to set back watershed planning and implementation of an ecosystem-based approach by decades. CELA recommends that Schedule 6 not be enacted in its present form and instead be withdrawn in its entirety from Bill 229."

The Government of Ontario has asked us to write our MPPs to express our views. Here it is: Remove Schedule 6 from Bill 229. And the next time you title a Bill the Protect, Support and Recover from COVID-19 Act, check with the Auditor General first "she has a few recommendations to help you get it right next time.

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