

Residents supported Council motion to oppose Provincial legislation

As Council voted to formally oppose pieces of Provincial legislation they believe will have a negative impact on the environment, development, and how communities plan for themselves, they did so with the backing of two residents who delegated to last week's Special Council meeting to express their support.

Stepping up to also voice their opposition to Ontario Bills 5 and 17 were Kathy Duncan of Climate Action Newmarket-Aurora and historian David Heard, who has been a long-time advocate for the environment.

While the two were in agreement over the potential negative impacts of the legislation, which is now law, they were also united in disappointment that only four members of Council – Ward 1 Councillor Ron Weese, Ward 2 Councillor Rachel Gilliland, Ward 3 Councillor Wendy Gaertner and, virtually, Ward 5 Councillor John Gallo – participated in the meeting.

I would like to remind the folks that are here that on their website, the Town of Aurora bills itself as an environmentally savvy town, which is dedicated to the management and protection of our local environment. Key concerns that Climate Action Newmarket-Aurora has around the Protect Ontario by Unleashing Our Economy Act, Bill 5, are predominantly, as we are a climate group, the reduced environmental protections and oversight, said Duncan.

Aurora is home to a number of flora and fauna, which are considered to be species at risk. Included within this, but not the only ones, are the butternut tree, which has been designated as an endangered species, the eastern whippoorwill, which is a bird and has been designated a threatened species, the monarch butterfly, which has been designated a species of special concern, and the northern map turtle, which has also been designated as a threatened species. As well, the Jefferson Salamander is noted as a threatened species. The amendments that have been passed into the Acts have the ability to limit this Town and every municipality in the province of Ontario's authority, to require developers to conduct comprehensive environmental impact studies.

They also limit the reports that can be requested for other design and development components of a project. Moreover, if a special economic zone is approved by the Minister of Cabinet, it can override all other legislation, approved official plans, green standards, community energy plans, and land protections.

While Mayor Mrakas was not in attendance at the July 15 meeting, Duncan referenced a public statement he made earlier in the month, when notice for the meeting was given, in which he said he believed it wasn't the time to oppose the legislation outright until it's fleshed out by the Province and its full impacts can be determined.

Mayor Mrakas, in his public statement, notes that the Association of Municipalities of Ontario includes 444 municipalities, and he indicates that the AMO recommends a wait-and-see approach, she said. What's not mentioned is that a number of those member municipalities of AMO have issued formal letters and or motions of Council to the province in opposition to these bills, despite the recommendation of AMO. In some cases, even subsequent to the passing of those Bills into law, the municipalities have called for one or both of those pieces of legislation to be rescinded.

The fact remains that the concerning wording is included in these new laws. No matter what regulations are brought in, the words and the ensuing powers within these acts won't change with regulation.

Both Duncan and Heard underscored the impacts the legislation will have on Indigenous Peoples and how their voices were completely ignored when the legislation in question was drafted.

I listened to the Councillor in the chair read the land acknowledgement, didn't hit home like it used to, said Heard of the start of the meeting, which was led on a Council vote by Councillor Gilliland. I've done land acknowledgements myself recently very proudly at many Town events as a vendor for the Town. I don't [think] I can say one after this Bill anymore the way I did before. And I'd actually ask the Town to reconsider rewriting that land acknowledgement after rereading this Bill again and see if it fits.

Also, as a long-time Aurora resident of six decades, I've watched our heritage fall apart. Say it straight out. I've sat on the Heritage Committee twice. I fought for over a decade to preserve the Aurora Pet Cemetery ? a long battle. This is a tougher battle. We have had so much put against us sitting on the Heritage Committee, being asked to reassess 287 homes and watching appeals, MZOs and everything. It's just I'm watching our history disappear. And as a person who has deep roots to the early 1800s, I'm highly offended. I'm more offended for our First Nations with this Bill.

?History is storytelling. Who were the best at it? How was it passed down? It's through our First Nations people. And we have deep roots here. You know, stories in history are preserved as reminders. Now we can wipe out like, what, environment history and archaeological?

?I heard water mentioned. There's nothing more important than water?. We have watched communities in Ontario have generally evidence-based, one manufacturer completely taint and destroy a water source. An example is Elmira, ON. This is serious stuff we're playing with, and I'm going to say that the only thing we have now, I believe, is we need to push this up the hill to the Federal government and ask them for their help. Maybe we need a two-tiered heritage system, national designations, and also a secondary heritage property or land of importance, because the province ain't helping us.?

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