December 17, 2009

Dear Mayor and Members of Council,

RE: CONSERVATION AUTHORITIES

I have been asked to circulate a motion I recently brought forward to the council of the Township of Essa. The resolution called for an independent 3rd party review of our local Conservation Authority and it was unanimously supported by our council.

The reason I requested a review was the escalating costs and steady stream of new restrictions, new permit fees and studies required to develop in our municipalities. It has made me question if these new restrictions are based on good planning or for revenue generation of a struggling conservation agency. Also the local CA has been asking for portions of applicants lands as part of the application process which should be a conflict of interest. Applicants feel if they do not comply with the CA demands there application may not be approved.

Our CA boasts of streamlining and promoting economic development, yet everything they do seems to create more costly red tape. Our goal as municipalities is to provide good planning at a reasonable cost to our ratepayers. In our area we pay for planning departments at the upper tier, the local municipality and the CA. Imagine if you had to pay 3 levels of government before you paved a road or purchased a new fire truck.

Our municipal levy to the CA has risen a staggering 249.8% over the last 9 years and permit fees have also risen dramatically, along with an ever expanding menu of red tape. For example our CA is now getting involved in soil evaluation which is generating new revenue and duplication. They have also dramatically expanded into new geographical areas thus creating more revenue.

My ultimate goal is to see the planning part of the CAs be amalgamated into the upper tier to eliminate multi levels of costly bureaucracy. This will leave the CAs to utilize the talents of there dedicated staff to repair our watersheds. They should be developing long range objectives for us to meet such as: Building public and private partnerships to plant trees, stabilizing river banks, improving spawning beds, etc. We are not getting the best bang for our buck and the CAs are becoming a major drag on economic development in many of our communities.

Our council recently held a public meeting to deal with an Official Plan Amendment (OPA). The applicant was an agricultural society wishing to develop an educational farming operation and
they asked council to allow a fair 5 days out of the year. Council knowing the geography of the municipality asked why they had not chosen other lands that would have been more suitable and avoided the need for an OPA. The planning consultant for the applicant stated that they had advised there clients to avoid any property that fell under jurisdiction of the local CA. That is something we are hearing more and more. We are also seeing more ratepayers doing work without permits to avoid the CAs and it is tough to tell them they are wrong when you know what the CA will put them through even for minor projects.

I have very little knowledge of relationships between other CAs and there municipalities, I am only referring to my local experience and have been asked by some of my area colleagues to circulate my motion. I hope your relationship is not strained, but if it is, now is the time to deal with it. If we had any other department with a 249.8 % increase over 9 years we would have dealt with it a long time ago.

If you wish to contact me, I have provided my information below.

Sincerely,

David Guergis

David Guergis, Mayor
Township of Essa, County of Simcoe
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Attach.
THAT the Council of the Township of Essa has identified the need for an independent review of the NVCA regarding how they collect and charge for permit fees, levy fees and the duplication of planning for residents, businesses and the municipalities in the NVCA catchment area;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Council of the Township of Essa requests municipalities in the NVCA watershed to support an immediate review by an independent third party who will be asked to develop an action plan on matters such as but not limited to, the duplication and required level of planning in the NVCA catchment area; halting collection of permit fees by the NVCA, but instead with municipalities collecting reasonable fees to meet the objectives set out in the Conservation Act, and passing along appropriate fees to the NVCA for services performed; streamlining of services and a strategy for reduction of levy fees; and further

THAT Essa Council looks forward to working with the NVCA in order to provide a better service to all residents of the area.

It is requested that a copy of this resolution be sent to all NVCA member municipalities for consideration and support.

Mayor:

Original Signed