April 3, 2008.

Mayor Fred Eisenberger and Council,
City of Hamilton,
City Hall, 2nd Floor, 71 Main Street, West,
Hamilton, ON  L8P 4Y5

Dear Mayor Eisenberger and Council:

Re: Environmental Commissioner of Ontario’s Annual Report

The Environmental Commissioner of Ontario released his latest annual report “Reconciling our Priorities” on December 4, 2007. Commissioner Miller urges the Province to take a broad view of environmental impacts associated with projected population growth in Ontario and the attendant stresses on the natural and physical infrastructure of the Province. The Commissioner is concerned that development pressures may lead to over exceeding the environmental limits or carrying capacity of the natural system upon which we depend for ecological services (e.g. waste assimilation, drinking water, etc.), demands for additional transportation infrastructure to accommodate more cars which results in further environmental degradation of the air, land and water, and continued aggregate extraction in environmentally sensitive areas.

The Grand River Conservation Authority concurs with the Commissioner regarding the need to address these issues sooner rather than later. For this reason, the Grand River Conservation Authority supports the ten recommendations outlined on pages 206-207 of the Commissioner’s Report and is requesting that the Province take prompt action in implementing each one (see attached).

At its meeting on March 29, 2008, the Grand River Conservation Authority members, by Resolution No. 35-08 ratified Motion No. CW-33-08 as follows:

WHEREAS the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario (ECO) strongly advocates the need to change the way planning is undertaken in Ontario to address environmental impacts related to projected growth and its attendant pressures on the natural and physical infrastructure of the province, be it resolved:

THAT the Grand River Conservation Authority support the ten recommendations contained in the 2006/2007 Annual Report of the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario and request the appropriate provincial agencies to take the appropriate actions to address “irreconcilable priorities”;

AND THAT the Grand River Conservation Authority request member municipalities to support these recommendations and ask appropriate provincial agencies to take appropriate action to address “irreconcilable priorities”;
AND THAT the Grand River Conservation Authority request member municipalities to incorporate sustainable water and environmental concepts into their Official Plans at the next available opportunity;

AND THAT the Grand River Conservation Authority request member municipalities and provincial agencies to support an update to the Grand River Basin Water Management Study which focuses on sustainable water management in the Grand River watershed and addresses the cumulative impacts of climate change and population growth on water quality and quantity;

AND THAT the Grand River Conservation Authority ask Conservation Authorities located within the Greater Golden Horseshoe to endorse a similar motion which requests their member municipalities to undertake similar actions.

The key message of Commissioner Miller’s report relates directly to many of the resource issues faced by the Grand River watershed and points to the urgent need for leadership in addressing population growth and climate change issues at the watershed level to ensure the future health and well-being of residents.

Consequently, the Grand River Conservation Authority asks that your municipality also support the Commissioner’s recommendations and request the Premier and the appropriate Ministers to implement them promptly.

The Grand River Conservation Authority also respectfully requests that your municipality consider incorporating sustainable water and environmental concepts into the next update of your Official Plan and support an update to the to the Grand River Basin Water Management Study which will focus on defining the nature and extent of potential cumulative impacts of climate change and population growth on water quality and quantity and identifying a range of management options to deal with these looming issues.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss our request further, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours very truly,

Alan Dale,
Chair,
Grand River Conservation Authority.

cc. Gord Miller
Environmental Commissioner of Ontario
2006/07 ECO Recommendations

Recommendation 1

The ECO recommends that MNR significantly speed up the process of wetland identification and evaluation and ensure that Provincially Significant Wetlands are incorporated into municipal official plans.

Recommendation 2

The ECO recommends that MMAH amend the Provincial Policy Statement to prohibit new infrastructure such as highways in Provincially Significant Wetlands unless there are no reasonable alternatives and it has been demonstrated that there will be no negative impacts on their ecological functions.

Recommendation 3

The ECO recommends that the provincial government reconcile its conflicting priorities between aggregate extraction and environmental protection. Specifically, the province should develop a new mechanism within the ARA approvals process that screens out, at an early stage, proposals conflicting with identified natural heritage or source water protection values.

Recommendation 4

The ECO recommends that MMAH work with MPIR to increase the GGH Plan’s intensification and density targets above existing business-as-usual development targets.

Recommendation 5

The ECO recommends that MNDM reform the Mining Act to reflect land use priorities of Ontarians today, including ecological values.

Recommendation 6

The ECO recommends that MNR reform the Public Lands Act to create a planning system that provides MNR with the tools to better protect ecological values on all Crown lands.
The ECO recommends that MOE develop a comprehensive, mandatory, province-wide road salts management strategy to ensure aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems are protected from chlorides.

The ECO recommends that MNR improve the rehabilitation rates of Ontario pits and quarries by introducing stronger legislation with targets and timelines, by applying up-to-date rules to grandparented licences, and by further strengthening the ministry's own field capacity for inspections.

The ECO recommends that MOE and OMAFRA develop quality standards that support land application of stable "pathogen-free" sewage biosolids.

The ECO recommends that, where new emitters are seeking entry into heavily burdened airsheds, MOE implement measures to minimize cumulative effects, for example, by obtaining emission offsets and speeding up the process of updating older Cs of A in that airshed.