

## **Motion – March 10, 2020 Regular Meeting of Council**

**Moved by:** Councillor Tania Jobin

**Seconded by:** Deputy Mayor Joe Bachetti

### **Background:**

In May 2019, the Ontario Government introduced the *More Homes, More Choice Act, 2019* (Bill 108) which proposed several legislative amendments to environmental statutes, including the *Conservation Authorities Act* (Act). These legislative changes aim to clearly define the core responsibilities of Conservation Authorities and to provide increased transparency and accountability with respect to program funding by municipalities. Currently in Ontario, there are 36 Conservation Authorities, with the Town of Tecumseh supported by the Essex Region Conservation Authority (ERCA).

Conservation Authorities were established to provide water-based programs and services to promote and protect the restoration, conservation, development and management of natural resources. For municipalities, they provide technical and advisory services with respect to resource management, land ownership and management for the protection of wetlands, and regulating and permitting development in or adjacent to hazard lands, wetlands, or watercourses. Conservation Authorities are frequently called upon as commenting agencies, and are engaged in the municipal planning approval process.

Currently, each Conservation Authority operates pursuant to the Act. Bill 108 introduced sweeping changes to the land use planning regime in Ontario, and the Act. Amendments to the Act include a new structure on how Conservation Authorities deliver programs and services tied to:

- Provincially Mandatory' programs such as natural hazards and flooding; conservation and management of lands; source water protection; the Lake Simcoe Act; and any other program that may be confirmed by regulation;
- Municipal programs and services that are delivered by a Conservation Authority through Agreement with a Municipality if the levy is used to fund the program;
- Conservation Authority programs and services that are approved by the Board of the Conservation Authority. These are largely externally funded programs that don't rely on either local or provincial funding.

Last year, the Town of Tecumseh and the Essex region were dealing with significant flooding, as the Ontario Government cut its funding to the Conservation Authority Flood Management programs by 50%. For ERCA, that represented \$98,000. Funding for Flood Management programs have remained unchanged since 1998, despite the increased numbers of flooding events across Ontario in recent years.

In August, the Ontario Government sent Conservation Authorities a letter advising them to wind down programs and services that were not provincially mandatory. Still to this day, there is no clarity provided by the Ontario Government on which programs and services to wind down, with the exception that if a municipality agrees, the Conservation Authority can continue to deliver other

municipal and conservation authority programs and services. The Provincial Government is undertaking a pre-consultation process with municipalities and multi-stakeholders.

**Resolution:**

**WHEREAS** the Town of Tecumseh is a member of the Essex Region Conservation Authority (ERCA) and is represented on their Board of Directors; and

**WHEREAS** the Board of Directors determines the policies, priorities, programs and services, and budgets of the Essex Region Conservation Authority in an open and transparent manner; and

**WHEREAS** the solutions to the problems the Essex Region is facing - great lakes water quality, climate adaptation, land degradation, habitat loss and endangered species, sustainable growth and development, and flooding and erosion - require the integrated, watershed-based programs and services delivered by the Essex Region Conservation Authority in partnership with municipalities and others; and

**WHEREAS** the 'conservation authority model', that was recently highlighted by the Provincial Flood Advisor as an extremely effective model for reducing flood risk, and a reason why Ontario is better situated to deal with flooding and climate change than other provinces; and

**WHEREAS** Conservation Authorities provide essential service to municipalities in their watersheds and deliver programs effectively, efficiently and in a cost-effective way; and

**WHEREAS** the Province of Ontario is reviewing the programs and services delivered by Conservation Authorities.

**NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED** that the Council of the Town of Tecumseh request that the Provincial Government maintain the 'watershed approach' to ensure that Conservation Authorities continue to deliver appropriate, watershed-wide programs and services to address the issues they are facing in their region; and

**THAT** the Provincial Government ensure that any changes to the legislation and regulation continue to allow for municipalities and conservation authorities the flexibility of including programs and services important to local circumstances of direct relevance to its watershed mandate, and further;

**THAT** the Province include experts from Conservation Authorities, staff of the Ministries of Natural Resources and Forestry, Environment Conservation and Parks as well as Municipal Affairs and Housing and municipalities when developing the draft regulations; and

**THAT** this resolution be forwarded to the Premier, the Minister of Environment, Conservation and Parks, the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, all local MPPs, the Essex Region Conservation Authority Board of Directors, Conservation Ontario, municipalities, and the Association of Municipalities of Ontario.