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CLUB
CANADA

Peel Region Group

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Region of Peel Delegation
February 25, 2009

Good morning Chairman Kolb and Councilors. My name is Peter Orphanos, Chair of Sierra Club Peel. I live at 5372 Drenkelly Court in Mississauga. (Bill introduces himself) We appreciate this opportunity to address Council this morning. Bill and I appear on behalf of Sierra Club Peel to support the important work of our Conservation Authorities and to respond from our perspective to concerns regarding CA's powers and funding levels.

We acknowledge the right of the previous speakers to state their point of view. However, it is important for your consideration that all sides of the issue be heard, including ours.

Our club's top priority is the protection of our Natural Heritage Systems as a pivotal component in addressing climate change. The most qualified professionals charged with protecting our Natural Heritage Systems are the staff of our Conservation Authorities. In Peel, we are very fortunate to have two competent stewards of our watersheds; Credit Valley Conservation and Toronto Region Conservation Authority

We believe that we are qualified to speak on the matters at hand today. Our club monitors conservation authority board meetings on a regular basis and partners with our CA's in several projects every year. We are current and involved in CA policies and decisions. As member of the Province's Source Water Protection Committee, I have seen first hand the high quality of work produced by CVC and TRCA. In addition, for the last couple of years, I was a member of the province's Conservation Authorities' Liaison Committee known as CALC. Our committee was represented by all relevant stakeholders, including the development sector. CALC's final report will soon be issued.

As a member of CALC, I played an active part in through exhaustive discussions reviewing the role and effectiveness of Conservation Authorities. Our committee concluded that there was no concern about the powers of CA's. The existing governance, basically controlled by elected municipal representatives offers the required checks and balances in decision making. Our two main concerns related to the consistency of authority decisions and the efficiency in processing applications. In regards to consistency, the problem rests with MNR ensuring that

regulations and guidelines are clearly articulated for consistent interpretation. In regards to efficiency of processing applications, we recommended that increased staffing would speed up the process. Also, educating developers in submitting complete applications would reduce delays in processing. We need to put our trust in this committee's conclusions rather than in any group that may put their own interest above the public good. We acknowledge that everyone has property rights but they are not absolute and must have due consideration for our responsibility to society.

Secondly, we must acknowledge the incredible amount of deliverables for which Conservation Authorities are responsible. Their climate change program alone is a daunting task demanding abundant resources. Its implementation is crucial to our health and well being and to the survival of our ecosystems. We know firsthand that our conservation authorities are giving us good value for our tax dollar. In fact CVC and TRCA are leaders among CA's in Ontario.

The Conservation Authority budget was decimated in the mid nineties by severe budget cuts. Since that time, there has been some recovery, thanks to Regional funding. Unfortunately, the deep cuts to MNR and MOE cost us dearly, not only in terms of lost natural systems, but in endangering human health as in Walkerton. We cannot afford to repeat the same mistakes and to be penny wise and pound foolish.

We want to thank you for your fair financial support of our authorities. We encourage you to continue your support commensurate with the amount of deliverables expected of our authorities. However, the province is not doing its part. We have already begun working with our new MNR Minister, Linda Jeffrey to have the province do its fair share. Watersheds are also a provincial responsibility and the province cannot be let off the hook. If any group has a legitimate concern about funding of CA's, they should be dealing with the province.

We get what we pay for. Peel residents want a quality of life where our natural heritage is strongly and permanently protected. Municipal and Provincial surveys and visioning forums have made it abundantly clear that our citizens place the protection of our natural environment as a top priority. We have a responsibility to honour the will of the people with action and results.

With that in mind, it is only logical that have serious concerns about those that would erode our Conservation Authorities' ability to do the essential work that our citizen's need. In our consultations with farming related groups, we have heard little concern about conservation authority powers or budget. Their major concern is viability. They want to be viable and to continue farming with enough profit to feed their families. That is where the focus needs to be.

After witnessing the developer driver planning of the last thirty years that has swallowed up about 94% of our natural areas, do we really want to undermine the powers of the only agency that has protected the few natural areas remaining? If it were not for conservation authorities, quite likely our natural heritage would have been totally decimated.

Sierra Club Peel stands firmly with this Council to push back any attempt that would erode the powers and budget of CA's. We do so, because the public has made it clear that our natural environment is a top priority and our conservation authorities are the champions and most qualified professionals in protecting that essential service. We ask for your ongoing financial and moral support for the outstanding work that CVC and TRCA are delivering for the public good. Thank you.

Submitted by,

Peter Orphanos Sierra Club Peel Chair
Bill Papoutsis Sierra Club Peel Vice Chair