

Opponents elated after Province vows to remove Section 10 of Bill 66

By Mark Pavilons

The provincial government, responding to the massive public outcry over provisions in Bill 66, has decided to remove a section of the bill when MPPs get back to work in February.

Municipal Affairs Minister Steve Clarke made the announcement last Wednesday, noting they will not go ahead with Section 10 of Bill 66, which would have impacted environmentally sensitive lands and public hearings on "open for business bylaws." These were the two main points of contentions that opponents rejected. Residents, citizen groups and environmental organizations across Ontario were vocal in their opposition to Bill 66 in recent weeks.

Clarke explained that "the use of this tool would never be approved at the expense of the Greenbelt or other provincial interests like water quality or public health and safety.

"Our Government for the People has listened to the concerns raised by MPPs, municipalities and stakeholders with regards to Schedule 10 of Bill 66 and when the Legislature resumes in February, we will not proceed with Schedule 10 of the Bill."

King-Vaughan MPP Stephen Lecce lauded the Minister's decision.

"Since receiving correspondence on Bill 66 and having a broad set of perspectives shared with me, I directly expressed the concerns of King-Vaughan residents about specific provisions of the Bill to Minister Clarke. I am honoured to serve as your representative at Queen's Park, and will continue to advocate on behalf of all the constituents of King-Vaughan."

"I am thrilled that Schedule 10 is being removed from Bill 66. It threatened the Greenbelt, the Oak Ridges Moraine, Lake Simcoe and source water protection areas by opening them up to development. If enacted we would have seen the essence of the value of our precious farmland being transformed from a place to grow our food to an opportunity for development," said Councillor Debbie Schaefer. "In addition, I feel empowered with this demonstration of what citizens can achieve. Every email, every petition, every protest and every conversation with a MPP has played a role in persuading the government to reverse their position on this. To work, democracy requires engaged citizens. And we need to stay engaged as there are several other pieces of legislation of concern under review such as the Places To Grow Act; proposed amendments to the latter would allow for expansion of settlement area boundaries and infrastructure into the Greenbelt."

King's council chambers were filled with dozens of opponents at the Jan. 14 meeting.

"I am thrilled and relieved that Schedule 10 of Bill 66 was withdrawn because it threatened to undermine our voice in how our communities evolve. It demonstrates that active public engagement is important for our democracy," said Schomberg's Mary Asselstine.

"We are pleased to see that the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing has listened to the thousands of Ontarians who demanded that proposed Bill 66 be stopped," said Tim Gray, executive director of Environmental Defence. "This environmentally destructive Bill's Schedule 10 would have opened up the Greenbelt, Oak Ridges Moraine, Lake Simcoe and source water protection areas to development. This is a major victory for the citizens who put up lawn signs, signed petitions, made calls to their MPPs and rallied outside of their offices. It also speaks to the power of the farmers, businesses and many Municipal leaders who publically opposed the Bill, and instead put farmland, natural areas and drinking water first.

"This is a positive step and we look forward to the Government proposing the removal of Schedule 10 from the Bill in committee hearings."

The Rescue Lake Simcoe Coalition and allies across the region and province have strongly opposed Schedule 10, which would have allowed for fast tracking certain development related to employment by overriding long-standing environmental protections, such as those contained in the Clean Water Act, the Lake Simcoe Protection Plan, and the Greenbelt Act.

"We are pleased that the government listened to concerns expressed by countless citizens, as well as community and environmental organizations, farmers' federations, municipalities, labour representatives and planning associations, among others. We saw a groundswell of support for protecting Ontario's water, farmland, communities and environment," said Claire Malcolmson, executive director. She also appeared before King council Jan. 14.

"The message to the government is clear: our water and environment is a shared heritage and should not be sacrificed to benefit a few; water is core to Ontarians' identity; and good planning must be accountable to the public.

?We want to thank all of the municipal politicians that showed leadership on this issue, including in the Lake Simcoe watershed, the councils of Bradford West Gwillimbury, Brock, Georgina, Aurora, and the Mayor of Barrie, Jeff Lehman. We'd also like to thank MPPs Andrea Khanjin, Caroline Mulroney, Jill Dunlop and Doug Downey for meeting with us and listening to our concerns. Most especially, we want to thank the countless supporters who stood up when it counted and lifted their voice with ours. We look forward to continuing to build a better Simcoe County, Lake Simcoe watershed, and a better Ontario.?