

Council board members resign over Bill 229

The provincial government's stance on Bill 229 has led to mass resignations from the Greenbelt Council. Council chair David Crombie submitted his resignation to Steve Clark, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Crombie said recent actions taken by the Government in committee hearings on Bill 229 "have confirmed that we differ fundamentally on policy directions affecting the Greenbelt. You will recall that the Council had urged your Government on previous occasions to withdraw Schedule 6 from Bill 229. This advice is grounded in the view that Ontarians can successfully realize the great values and benefits of the Greenbelt through the effectiveness of watershed planning, the strength and resilience of the Conservation Authorities and the power of public participation and open debate. It is now clear that the Government's direction under Schedule 6 of Bill 229 disastrously assaults all three of these primary conditions. It cuts out the heart of integrated watershed planning and management; severely cripples the Conservation Authorities in the pursuit of their historic stewardship of environmental issues, and now with the grossly expanded use of Ministerial Zoning Orders (MZO) and other procedural revisions, essential public discussion and debate will be stifled or shut down. Crombie said this is not policy and institutional reform. It's "high-level bombing and needs to be resisted." Council member Deborah Martin-Downs followed suit, noting the province doesn't value the advice of the council, and the role that conservation authorities play in public safety and environmental quality. "It is now clear that the government's direction under Schedule 6 of Bill 229 is a blatant assault on conservation, the environment and transparent governance," she said. Environmental Defence said Crombie's departure is a shame. Kevin Eby, Leith Moore, Pamela Blais, Wayne Caldwell and MPP Lynn Morrow all resigned. "It is a great shame and a loss to the people of Ontario that David Crombie, the chair of the provincially appointed Greenbelt Council, had no alternative but to resign," said Executive Director Tim Gray. "His resignation comes as a direct result of Minister Steve Clark's refusal to listen to the Council's advice and remove Schedule 6 from Bill 229 (the budget bill)." Gray said Crombie and the Council have been key thinkers and advisors to the Ontario government on how to best protect farmland, natural features and economic prosperity. It is tragic that their impartial advice has been ignored and overridden by the self-serving demands of developers. "It is not too late for the Ontario government to finally listen to the advice of the Council and remove the attacks on our future, contained in Schedule 6 of the budget bill. All Ontarians are watching," Gray said.