

**Presentation to the Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee
March 9, 2006
Ottawa Forests and Greenspace Advisory Committee**

Item No. 1: The Proposed Workplan for Resolution of Community Wetlands Concerns

Thank you for the opportunity to speak tonight. With me is Danielle Fremes, the OFGAC member who will be dealing with wetlands issues as we progress through this file. We thank you for the opportunity to present our committee's comments on the staff's wetlands workplan. We recognize that this is an important step in the process of working toward a resolution of community wetlands concerns. We hope that this coming together will identify an approach that everyone accepts. In the end, effective stewardship of the land, including wetlands, is something upon which we think we can all agree is vital to our future.

The Ottawa Forests and Greenspace Advisory Committee was established to provide advice and guidance to you, the Council members on trees, greenspaces, open spaces and wetlands to help safeguard the environment of the city.

That includes input into

- policies related to greenspace preservation;
- the management of urban and rural forests; and
- recommendations on how to meet the greenspace and forest-related objectives as outlined in the Official Plan and other planning documents.

Wetlands, including greenspace were added to our mandate in the Governance Review of 2003-04.

Our presence here tonight is the first of what I expect will be many such presentations as ARAC's mandate is expanded. We look forward to working with you.

We also hold our some of our monthly meetings outside the urban core (City Hall). I hope that when we come to Richmond or Stittsville, that you will come to our meeting.

For the most part, we intend to restrict our comments to the draft workplan. You know how important wetlands are, the benefits they provide in terms of

- water purification,
- greenhouse gas sequestering,
- water retention and flood control
- rural well and aquifer recharge,
- erosion control and many others.

So, we won't belabour those points. As we speak, citizens, organizations and municipalities all across Ontario, and indeed Canada, are trying almost desperately, to save our remaining wetlands or restore the ones that have been damaged or lost.

There are many positive features in this Work Plan:

- The research and required background work identified in the workplan, such as options for wetland conservation and approaches to land conservation (Definition of Wetlands Section) is good and appropriate.
- Developing an approach for evaluation of cumulative effects from development and water-taking (Municipal Draining Issues) is long overdue.
- Taking action to ensure that natural drainage is not impeded from actions that the City has taken or not taken in the recent past – such as beaver control on municipal land is another issue that needs resolution.
- Communicating with residents about the Clean Water Act and preparing material for the public to outline the benefits of wetlands are two good ideas. No doubt, other ideas will emerge as we move forward in this process.
- Full and open discussions with stakeholders are always a good idea and we will comment on stakeholder representation in a few moments.

However, there is a phrase in the staff report that concerns us

“consider a process that requires landowner consent for changes in land use designation or zoning”.

While we understand that this may have arisen as a result of statements made before or during the Rural Summit, we are concerned about the possible legal implications of this statement. The responsibility for zoning rests with a municipality and there are formalized procedures established for the review of any proposed changes. Tonight we are seeking clarification from you and from staff in regard to the City’s intent.

Here are our Committee’s recommendations for strengthening the plan.

Clarification of Some Portions of the Plan

- The Action item in the Municipal Drainage Issues, *“Explanation of known aspects of wetlands development”* needs to be restated or elaborated upon for clarification of the work intended to be done here.
- The Action item in the Impact of Wetland Designation Section, that describes a *“Legal Services’ review of the approach of other jurisdictions in the area of wetlands protection and application of the Provincial Policy Statement”*, should be expanded to also consider the legality of the options for wetland conservation and approaches to land conservation (identified as action items in the Definition of Wetlands section). This would be done to help determine the feasibility of the options and approaches under current legislation. As we understand the situation, the City is required to appropriately zone wetlands after the province has defined the specific areas.

Stakeholder Representation

- We are concerned that the representation on the Stakeholder group is not in balance with the makeup of the city. We strongly suggest that you include groups from the rural southern and eastern part of Ottawa: where is the representation from Rideau, Osgood, Cumberland? Wetlands there

are as important to them as they are to the residents in the western part of Ottawa.

- We also note that other important stakeholders, especially residents of Goulbourn not represented by the Goulbourn Landowners Group, the Ottawa-Carleton Landowners Group or the Rural Task Force, are missing from the proposed stakeholder group.
 - Other residents may have been less vocal or with less organizational structure than the groups already represented in the stakeholder group, but they do deserve a voice at the table. We recommend that an effort to encourage participation of other interested residents or groups – there was at one time an informal group called the Goulbourn Wetlands Group – be made. Should they not be at the table?
- The stakeholders group also lacks citizen representation from the former March Township and from Carp. We know that residents there are concerned about wetlands.
- We also recommend other highly knowledgeable parties, such as Wildlife Habitat Canada/Wetland Habitat Fund or Ducks Unlimited whose staff have training in these matters, be invited to participate on the Stakeholder Group.
- The Ontario Ministry of Environment is listed as a participant in several “Actions” in the Municipal Drainage Issues Section, but not among the proposed Stakeholder Group. We suggest that the MOE be added as a stakeholder.
- Other groups whose names do not appear here and who might be invited to participate include
 - Munster Community Association (they have an interest in the Huntley Wetlands Complex);
 - The Ottawa Field-Naturalists Club (Canada's oldest natural history/scientific organization);
 - Representatives from Councillor's offices in the southern and eastern part of Ottawa.
- And finally, there is a vast amount of expertise available to you in the form of the federal Department of the Environment. Units in that department, especially the Canadian Wildlife Service, have been working for decades on wetland issues. They have worked out easement and tax issues. Would it not be worth while to give someone there a call?

Thank you for your time and consideration of our remarks, and we look forward to working with you. We are pleased that staff have included both OFGAC and EAC on the stakeholder group. EAC's mandate in regard to contaminants and greenhouse gas/climate change will almost certainly come into play here.

So, to sum up, we commend you for this taking on this challenge.

1. We recommend that you clarify the wording in the work plan to address the issues we raised regarding landowner consent, chronology of wetlands development, and the approach of other jurisdictions.
2. We also recommend that you expand the Stakeholder group to include some, if not all, of the groups that we mentioned.

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