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Subject: FW: Online Form - Request to Speak at a Standing Committee
Date: Tuesday, May 18, 2021 9:32:48 AM

From: Niagara Region Website
Sent: Tuesday, 18 May 2021 09:32:40 (UTC-05:00) Eastern Time (US & Canada)
To: Clerks
Subject: Online Form - Request to Speak at a Standing Committee

Request to Speak at a Standing Committee

To reply, copy the email address from below and put into 'To'. (if resident entered their email address)

Name

Susan Murphy

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City

Vineland Station

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Email

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Organization

standing committee

Regional Council

Presentation Topic

Natural Environment System

Presentation includes slides

No

Previously presented topic

No

Presentation Details

I will be speaking to the natural environment system and the options of 3B and 3C.

Video Consent

Yes



Hi everyone, My name is Susan Murphy, I'm a lifetime resident of Lincoln, I'm a registered nurse but I also owned and operated a business in Lincoln for 15 years. I was born on a farm in Beamsville along the lake. Even as a child I knew it was a very unique place. I love Niagara. I've travelled extensively through 20+ countries on 5 continents and there were opportunities to live and work in some of the most beautiful places in the world. But I choose to live in Lincoln because it's exceptional. I could easily speak to climate change and flooding, but due to time constraints I'm going to address the importance of protecting biodiversity and habitats in the Niagara Region.

Not many places can boast all that we have: being situated between two freshwater lakes, sandy beaches, the ability to grow tender fruit, natural waterfalls, rare species of animals and birds. We have the world renowned owl sanctuary here on Jordan Harbour, and we are home to the most diverse flora and fauna in the country. And all of this precariously mixed in with growth and development.

We're losing natural greenspaces and their ecosystems at breakneck speed. As of 2016, in huge part because of urban sprawl, less than 15% of the Carolinian Forest remains. In Niagara there are still hundreds of species of birds, fish, mammals, plants and trees in wetlands, woodlands, streams, rivers, and shorelines and other aquatic habitats. A whopping 58 of these ecosystem types are considered rare and each have a distinctive set of species. There are currently over 500 species at risk in all of Canada, and an astounding number of those species - one third - can be found here in the Carolinian Zone. You can see dozens and dozens of species that are on the provincial and national lists for being at risk, threatened, or endangered. We don't have to watch them be wiped out, we can be part of the solution to save them. It's to our advantage in all ways to do so.

https://caroliniancanada.ca/legacy/SpeciesHabitats_RareCommunities.htm

(Endangered, Threatened, At risk:)

[SpeciesHabitats_CC_SAR.htm](#)

We now know that when there are viable greenspaces throughout urban areas it leads to healthy and thriving communities. Greenspaces encourage year round outdoor activity, physical health, and wide scale social interaction. The World Health Organization in 2017 made it clear that healthy greenspace and healthy ecosystems "promote mental and physical health, and reduce morbidity and mortality in urban residents by providing psychological relaxation and stress alleviation, stimulating social cohesion, supporting physical activity, and reducing exposure to air pollutants, noise and excessive heat."

<https://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/environment-and-health/urban-health/publications/2016/urban-green-spaces-and-health-a-review-of-evidence-2016>

So, by ensuring the healthy ecosystems for our wetlands and woodlands and aquatic systems, the health of our natural environment system, you're acting in the public's best interest here in Niagara. The strongest protection of these systems is necessary for the public's physical and psychological health and nothing less will do. I can't live in an area that doesn't have a healthy natural heritage system, it's not 'living' to me when an area isn't naturally and sustainably healthy.

It often comes down to money. In terms of finances it only makes sense if we opt for viable natural heritage systems. We have massive untapped potential for wealth through the world class ecotourism that's right at our fingertips. This revenue would far surpass any income from urban sprawl. Protecting our natural heritage systems is a win-win situation for the Region and the Public.

For just 4 weeks in May in Leamington, Ontario alone the revenue from birdwatching was approximately \$12 - \$14 million dollars. That's in only 28 days and that figure is from 2013. And again that's only for 4 weeks, during migration, and Niagara has the potential for triple that with not only Spring migration but for fall migration and winter gull and duck birding. *In 2011, birders in the US spent over \$29 Billion dollars just on food, lodging and travel. We have a ready made market in Toronto and the US.

<https://windsorstar.com/news/a-birding-app-for-windsor-essex>

<http://www.patagoniaalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/2011-Birding-Economic-Report.pdf> *

Our backyard is a world class destination right now, but we have to reduce habitat loss and maintain, restore and improve natural heritage systems. The marshland in Jordan Harbour alone houses all the birds found in Leamington and Pelee Island, where these figures come from. We have egrets, heron, warblers, hawks, owls and many many more.

Birding is now so successful that Essex County has created a birding app highlighting not just local birds and the popular birdwatching spots, but local tourist attractions, museums, restaurants, wineries, and local businesses. They partnered with the National Parks Authority and Conservation Authority. We're talking tens of millions of dollars from just ONE source of proven ecotourism. One source. I don't have time here to get into the others but everyone knows our hiking trails have been packed during Covid.

<https://windsorstar.com/news/a-birding-app-for-windsor-essex>

What we have now, and what we have if we only vote for 3B, isn't a sustainable ecosystem, it's fractured and disconnected and won't survive. The only way to keep these wetlands and woodlands thriving and healthy means buffering them and providing linkages between them. My daughter and I watched a fox cut through a building site on the edge of an orchard in Vineland last Thursday, it trotted across Victoria Avenue and stood looking through the fence at the schoolyard. A perfect example of how desperately we need the linkages for the system to survive. Many of us see deer popping onto the road from orchards and vineyards, trying to get to the next small wooded lot. There are turtles crossing through subdivisions and on busy roads, many of which don't make it. But they all will use linkages. We need the system connected if the system is to survive.

****The Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs provides a clear definition of what a Natural Heritage System is when it states:**

“Natural Heritage Systems are connected systems of natural features and areas and the lands and waters that link them together.”

*****The Provincial Policy Statement is also clear on what a Natural Heritage System is intended to do. It states:**

“The diversity and connectivity of natural features in an area, and the long-term ecological function and biodiversity of natural heritage systems, should be maintained, restored or, where possible, improved, recognizing linkages between and among natural heritage features and areas, surface water features and ground water features.”

Neither of these government documents suggests linkages are optional in urban areas. 3C provides for these linkages in urban areas. 3B excludes linkages in urban areas and even small linkages outside of urban areas.

The Provincial Policy statement states: “Natural Heritage Areas should be maintained, restored or where possible improved.” The improvements to natural features are not possible with 3B in urban areas as it doesn't allow for the linkages vital to maintaining the significant features, or provide minimum buffers to protect them, or provide enhancement areas to help restore them. I don't understand how 3B can be compliant with the Provincial Policy Statement.

I know some members of Council are concerned with how a Natural Environment System would impact farmers. I grew up on a farm, protection of agricultural use is very important to me, too. But the Provincial Policy Statement makes it clear that, quote:

“Nothing in (Natural Heritage) policy 2.1 is intended to limit the ability of agricultural uses to continue.” Additionally, Councillor Zalepa asked staff what impact an NES would have on agricultural uses at the committee meeting and he was told, clearly, “none”.

I have also heard concerns expressed that 3C would place too much of a limit on developable land in urban areas. But the staff report says it would only require. .1% of land in urban areas to create linkages and another 1.4% to create buffers and enhancement areas.

A 1.5% difference in land usage between 3B and 3C. That seems like an insignificant price to pay, or a negligible one, to create a variable Natural Environment System.

Clearly, there is a private interest in opening up as much land for development as possible but there is also clearly a public interest in protecting a healthy Region-wide environmental system.

I don't understand why our elected officials would vote for a Natural Environment System Option that doesn't protect the Public interest. I encourage you to please vote for Option 3C and save our beautiful and rare environment, for the public. It won't be here for us or the next generation if we don't act now.

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<http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/landuse/agsys-sum.htm>

Provincial Policy Statement

<https://files.ontario.ca/mmah-provincial-policy-statement-2020-accessible-final-en-2020-02-14.pdf>