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January 10, 2025

via email

Mayor and Council
Town of the Blue Mountains
32 Mill Street
Thornbury, ON N0H 2P0

Re: Draft Charter for Watershed Security

Dear Mayor and Council,

It is the understanding of the Grey Sauble Conservation Authority (GSCA) that Council received correspondence from a local resident regarding a "Draft Municipal Charter for Watershed Security", and further that Council has referred this correspondence to the GSCA for review and comment.

We have reviewed the provided correspondence, as well as an attached Council motion from July 15, 2024, regarding a proposed "Watershed Summit" and offer the following discussion items.

Background:

1. Ontario's Conservation authorities are established by legislation on a watershed basis.
2. The boundaries of the Town of the Blue Mountains are fully within the jurisdiction of the Grey Sauble Conservation Authority (84%), and the Nottawasaga Valley Conservation Authority (16%).
3. These two conservation authorities have been in existence since 1957 and 1960, respectively.
4. Integrated watershed planning is a role that is already being fulfilled by both conservation authorities, and conservation authorities remain the most appropriate agency to carry out this role.
5. Some of the services that GSCA provides within this context are:
 - a. Managing, monitoring, and communicating the risk of natural hazards related to flood and erosion. This includes GSCA's plan review and permitting roles that works to keep development away from natural hazards. As well as flood forecasting and warning activities and the operation and maintenance of flood and erosion control infrastructure.
 - b. Monitoring and reporting on stream and watershed health.
 - c. Undertaking forestry and stewardship activities, to improve habitats and reduce or reverse the ecological impacts of human uses of the landscape.
 - d. Protection of municipal sources of drinking water through risk management plans for well-head protection zones and intake protection zones.
 - e. Effectively managing natural areas for public recreation, biodiversity, natural flood attenuation and drought resistance.

Member Municipalities

Municipality of Arran-Elderslie, Town of the Blue Mountains, Township of Chatsworth, Township of Georgian Bluffs, Municipality of Grey Highlands, Municipality of Meaford, City of Owen Sound, Town of South Bruce Peninsula

- f. Educational programming to increase environmental awareness and responsibility, provide opportunities to connect with nature, and encourage conservation action.
6. Prior to the implementation of Bill 23, local conservation authorities also provided natural heritage (woodland, wetland, ANSI, etc) review for municipal planning applications under service agreements. This review was conducted with a watershed lens. It is our understanding that the County of Grey is sufficiently resourced to undertake this review on behalf of the municipality for Planning Act applications.

Although conservation authorities are no longer legislatively permitted to conduct this review for Planning Act applications, we can still participate and assist municipalities in undertaking general watershed and/or sub-watershed plans that could provide a framework and an understanding of the watershed for the municipality to incorporate into future municipal plan documents.

Moving Forward:

1. We agree that using the watershed as the scale for land use planning is the most meaningful approach, because water and waterways are essential to both our communities and ecosystems, and they cross over municipal boundaries.
2. We agree that undertaking watershed and sub-watershed planning exercises would position the Town, and your adjacent municipal partners, to make more responsible and informed decisions regarding land-use planning.
3. It is our opinion that undertaking wholistic watershed and sub-watershed planning will prepare the Town to be more development ready, allowing for smoother and more timely development application processes. This is because all parties will have a clear understanding of what is developable and what is not based on the goals and objectives of the Town and the community.
4. We agree that involving the citizens within the community to engage on the development of these plans is vital to success.
5. It is our opinion that this type of work should be led by the municipality(ies) in conjunction with your local conservation authorities to ensure an unbiased, consistent and comprehensive approach that benefits from decades of integrated watershed management experience.
6. Regarding the specific recommended elements from the correspondence provided, these are all valuable considerations for the Town to include in land-use decisions. Some of these could be incorporated into existing municipal planning documents (eg: Official Plans), and some could be built into guidance documents (eg: Standard Terms of Reference or requirements for Environmental Impact Studies).
7. Some considerations for the Town in moving forward:
 - a. Have you had dialogue with the other municipalities that you share your watershed with to determine a coordinated approach?
 - b. Is the Town prepared to partner with neighbouring municipalities and relevant conservation authorities to ensure success?

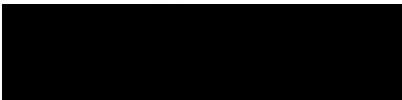
- c. For elements that require monitoring of development, does the Town have the capacity to undertake this. If not, does the Town have the tools to require this of developers? If issues are identified, what mechanisms does the Town have to rectify the issue(s)?
 - d. To what degree do the Charter elements align with the strategic directions of the Town?
 - e. Has the Town set aside funds or is the Town planning to set aside funds to accomplish these goals/elements?
8. Regarding the Watershed Summit, it is our understanding that this event will be used as a learning opportunity to gather groups together with a common interest in watershed health. It is highly recommended that conservation authorities (CA) be involved so they can showcase successes, challenges, projects and initiatives. This may open opportunities for collaboration and allow participants to learn about where there are gaps in the work of the CAs and identify focus areas.

Summary:

Overall, GSCA is supportive of using the watershed as the meaningful scale for land-use planning. Generally, the elements suggested in the Watershed Charter are positive and would promote watershed health. It is our opinion that positive results can be achieved through ongoing partnerships between relevant municipal and conservation authority partners. Further, we believe that comprehensively engaging all sectors of the community would help to develop the most robust and effective plan.

We would be happy to discuss this further with Council and/or Staff of the Town.

Regards,



Tim Lanthier
Chief Administrative Officer
Grey Sauble Conservation Authority

Cc via email:

GSCA Board of Directors
Ms. Sheryl Flannagan, Interim CAO, NVCA