



Regular Council Meeting

To:	Mayor and Council
Date:	June 15, 2020
From:	Karen Ellis, Director of Planning
Report Number:	Planning 2020-12
Subject:	Provincially Significant Wetlands Mapping

Recommendation:

That Council express support for a more open and transparent public review of provincially significant wetland evaluations by providing a copy of the resolution to the Premier of Ontario, the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) and the Rural Ontario Municipal Association (ROMA).

Overview:

At the May 4, 2020 Council Meeting, the Township received correspondence from the Township of Perth South, the Municipality of West Nipissing, the Village of Merrickville-Wolford and Norfolk County regarding the mapping of provincially significant wetlands. All of these municipalities passed resolutions outlining concerns with the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry's (MNRF) practices and procedures with the implementation of provincially significant wetlands designations.

The above-noted Councils expressed concerns that the expansion of provincially significant wetland areas detrimentally affects landowners and the assessment base. They want the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry to:

1. provide supporting evidence for the expansion of provincially significant wetland areas within their boundaries;
2. to change their practices and procedures to include a requirement to provide supporting evidence to impacted municipalities; and
3. to seek meaningful engagement with affected property owners.

On May 4, 2020, Council passed resolution R/04/05/20/13 referring this item to staff to report back with additional information.

Provincially significant wetlands (PSWs) are those areas identified by the Province as being the most valuable. They are determined by a science-based ranking system known as the Ontario Wetland Evaluation System (OWES). This system provides a standardized method of assessing wetland functions and societal values to enable the Province to evaluate and rank wetlands relative to one another. All wetland evaluations are completed using the OWES principles and evaluators must be certified. At https://www.grca.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/stdprod_091597.pdf is a fact sheet about the OWES system, wetland complexes and wetland boundary delineations.

According to MNRF, wetland evaluation files are always “open” and new information can affect a wetland’s ranking. The Provincial Policy Statement (under the Planning Act) does not permit development of site alteration in significant wetlands and as such, only qualified and trained evaluators can accurately define a wetland boundary as part of wetland mapping (i.e., constraint mapping) or part of the development process. Landowners can discuss their properties and the wetlands with MNRF but there is no public input process outside the development application process to challenge evaluated wetland boundaries.

Wetlands are a tremendous asset to a community. They provide clean and abundant water, reduce flooding and reduce the effects of climate change among other things. The Province of Ontario has the Ontario Wetland Conservation Strategy. The Strategy is intended to help stop the loss of wetlands and restore wetlands in areas where significant losses have occurred. A copy of the Strategy can be found at: https://files.ontario.ca/mnr_17-075_wetlandstrategy_final_en-accessible.pdf

In the Township of Cavan Monaghan, provincially significant wetlands include: the Cavan Bog Wetland Complex; the Peterborough Airport Wetland Complex; the Pigeon River No. 23 Complex; the Jackson Creek Lowlands; the Jackson Creek Headwaters; Jackson Creek Wetland; and the Cavan Creek Wetland. A map of the significant wetlands is provided as Attachment No. 1 to this Report. All of the significant wetlands are located north of Millbrook and notably the Cavan Creek Wetland crosses the entire width of the Cavan Ward. The Cavan Bog is a special and well-known feature of the Township.

In accordance with Provincial Policy, development is not permitted in provincially significant wetlands. Development means the creation of a new lot, a change in land use, or the construction of buildings and structures requiring approval under the *Planning Act*. Development does not include activities that create or maintain infrastructure authorized under an environmental assessment process or works subject to the *Drainage Act*. The Township of Cavan Monaghan’s planning documents conform to Provincial Policy.

With the adoption of the Cavan Monaghan Official Plan, a natural heritage system was implemented in Cavan Monaghan Township. The natural heritage system includes significant wetlands, woodlands, wildlife habitat, valley lands, areas of natural and scientific interest, buffer areas around these features and lands that link these areas.

The System includes the Natural Core Areas, Natural Linkage Areas, Oak Ridges Moraine Natural Core Area, and Oak Ridges Moraine Natural Linkage Area designations. The policies for these designations are found in Section 6 of the Official Plan and the mapping of the features is provided on Schedules B and B-1 to the Plan. In Zoning By-law No. 2018-58, as amended, the Natural Systems Zones include the Natural Core Area and Natural Linkage Zones. The regulations for these Zones are found in Section 8 of By-law No. 2018-58, as amended.

The development of the Hamlets of: Cavan; Five Mile Turn; Mount Pleasant; and Fraserville are somewhat affected by the area and significance of the Cavan Bog and the Cavan Creek Wetland. Locally significant and unevaluated wetlands may affect the development of Millbrook. Moving forward with the Township's Official Plan work, a review of the provincial wetland mapping is essential and high priority. As indicated earlier in this Report, wetlands are a tremendous asset to a community and need protection but the information and mapping must be accurate. With good information, the Township can make wise land use planning decisions.

The Wetland Conservation Strategy indicates that one of the greatest challenges to wetland conservation in Ontario is the limited value that society, as a whole, places on the functions that wetlands perform and the services and benefits they provide. The Strategy recognizes the need for better education, communication and awareness about the importance of wetlands and the role they play in maintaining a healthy environment and supporting our quality of life. One goal of the Strategy is to develop and advance public awareness of, appreciation for and connection to Ontario's wetlands. More public involvement, better documentation and transparency in the wetland evaluation process may result in better awareness of the importance and role of wetlands as well as providing the reasoning and rationale behind some land use planning policies, regulations and decisions.

Financial Impact:

None at this time.

Attachments:

Attachment No. 1: Provincially Significant Wetlands in Cavan Monaghan Township

Respectfully Submitted by,

Reviewed by,

Karen Ellis,
Director of Planning

Yvette Hurley
Chief Administrative Officer

Attachment No. 1: Provincially Significant Wetlands in Cavan Monaghan Township

