



July 8, 2019

Members of the Board
Nottawasaga Valley Conservation Authority
8195 8th Line
Utopia, Ontario
L0M 1T0

Dear Board Members:

I am writing in response to the request that I resign as Chair of the board for the Nottawasaga Valley Conservation Authority.

I believe there are no grounds for such a request.

In January 2019, board members selected me as their Chair. Since then I have worked diligently and tirelessly in my role. I have chaired several meetings, attended numerous functions on behalf of the Authority, and attended Conservation Ontario meetings representing the Authority to the best of my ability.

At all times while carrying out my duties, I have performed with integrity and honour while striving to advance the interests of the Authority.

I am proud of the work we do as a board and I am just as equally proud of NVCA staff for the important job they perform on behalf of our member municipalities.

My understanding is the board believes I should step down as Chair due to the position my municipality took on the future role of the Authority while providing comments to the province on the regional governance review.

As the board knows, at the Town of Wasaga Beach's May 9, 2019 Coordinated Committee meeting, we received a report on staff comments regarding the regional governance review.

We authorized our mayor and CAO to submit the comments to the Regional Review Special Advisors as the town's submission. I am enclosing a copy of that document for your consideration.

We also authorized the mayor and our CAO to circulate the document to the County of Simcoe, member municipalities, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, and local MPPs.

Of concern to the board is Wasaga Beach's view on the future of conservation authorities. Specifically, the town states the following: *These authorities (NVCA and Lake Simcoe Conservation Authority) should be dissolved and their responsibilities under the Conservation Authorities Act pertaining to flood control, watershed interests, protection of drinking water sources, and land use planning applications should be assumed by the County of Simcoe. This would reduce duplication between local governments and the authorities and allow for a coordinated approach to be applied across both watersheds, leading to more effective and efficient decision making.*

The town made this comment in response to the province's request for ideas to make lower-tier government more efficient. The town's recommendation on conservation authorities is one area the province might want to consider. It should be noted that the Council of the County of Simcoe, in its submission to the province on the regional review with regard to conservation authorities, suggested that the current delivery is either challenged, inefficient or not provided at the right level, or requires a more detailed analyses. In addition to this, the need for conservation authority structural changes is a topic acknowledged by Conservation Ontario.

Whether the Government of Ontario wishes to implement the town's position is up to Premier Doug Ford and his cabinet.

At no point has the Town of Wasaga Beach considered a specific resolution calling for the formal disbandment of the NVCA or conservation authorities in general, and at no period has the town ever stated it believes management of natural resources in the watershed is not important.

The comments submitted by the town represent concepts for further consideration by the provincial government and should not be taken as anything more.

In addition, as the town's representative at the Authority, at no time have I ever put forward a motion suggesting the Authority cease to exist.

Sitting as a councillor for the Town of Wasaga Beach, I supported our recommendations to the province. Sitting as a member of the NVCA, I act in good faith in all I do for the Authority, as per the requirements of section 2.0.4 of our Governance and Administrative policies.

With more than 12 years of experience on council and a variety of boards and committees, I am fully aware of the importance of separating the two roles and my obligations to the Authority as an appointed member when I sit on the Authority.

I believe that asking me to step down as Chair sets a dangerous precedent for members going forward should they find themselves in similar situations in the future, where their municipality takes a stand on an issue perceived to be contrary to the best interests of the Authority. There are mechanisms under the Authority's Procedural By-law to deal with such situations, should any arise. It would be my intent, should the situation arise, where I find myself in conflict with a position my municipality took with respect to a matter before the Board that is detrimental to the Authority, to step aside and let the Vice-Chair deal with the matter.

I have reviewed the Conservation Authorities Act and can find no grounds for me to resign as Chair.

Furthermore, under the NVCA's bylaws and policies, with respect to the role of the Chair (Section 2.1.1) and Code of Conduct, I have in no way violated any of these policies.

Should the province act on Wasaga Beach's comment with respect to the future role of the Authority, I will step aside and let the Vice-Chair address the situation. In the interim, it is my intent to continue to fulfill the role I was elected to do. To be clear, I do not intend to step down as Chair.

Further, I am disappointed with the unprofessional manner some board members treated me during our June 24 meeting. My role as Chair was not an item on the agenda and discussion of me was improper.

Discussion should have taken place during a future meeting. Under the board's Administrative Bylaws, Section 3.6 Order of Business, it states that, *"No member shall present any matter to the authority for its consideration unless the matter appears on the agenda for the meeting of the authority or leave is granted to present the matter by affirmative vote of a majority of members present."* It is also my understanding that for a matter to be considered in Closed Session, it has to be listed on the agenda.

Such a serious matter as removing a Chair does not merit adding to the agenda at last minute. Doing so is capricious and there is no way for proper consideration of the matter at hand nor is there time for anyone to prepare for a meaningful discussion.

Moreover, the discussion of my role as Chair should not have taken place in open session with the public present.

Under the board's Administrative Bylaws, Section 3.14 (Closed Session Meetings) it states that, *"Meetings may be closed to the public if the subject matter being considered relates to ... personal matters about an identifiable individual, including employees of the authority."*

In my opinion to have my role as Chair referred to as "unseemly" by a fellow member of the Authority, especially in open session, is uncalled for and in violation of the Authority's Code of Conduct. I will remind the board the code states members shall: *"Conduct oneself in a manner which reflects respect and professional courtesy and does not use offensive language in or against the authority or any member or any authority staff."*

I will speak with the Ontario Ombudsman about whether our June 24 meeting is in violation of our rules. I also wish to discuss with the ombudsman whether there are grounds for complaint regarding comments about my character.

In closing, I welcome the opportunity to discuss my position further with the board at an appropriate time.

Sincerely,



George Watson, Chair
Nottawasaga Valley Conservation Authority.

c. Mayor Bifulchi and Members of Council
Mayors of Member Municipalities

Encl.