



Friday, February 12, 2021

Township of Ramara  
2297 Hwy 12, PO Box 130  
Breachin ON L0K 1B0

Dear Mayor Clarke and Council,

**Re: Formal withdrawal of Rama Road MZO request**

On behalf of Ontario Nature and Environmental Defence, we are writing to urge that Ramara Township formally withdraw the request for a Minister's Zoning Order (MZO) to fast-track three proposed developments off Rama Road on the shore of Lake Couchiching.

Ontario Nature is a charitable conservation organization that protects wild species and wild spaces across Ontario through conservation, education and public engagement. Environmental Defence is a leading Canadian environmental advocacy organization that works with government, industry and individuals to defend clean water, a safe climate and healthy communities.

We understand, based on comments by Mayor Basil Clarke at a meeting with Orillia councilors this week, that the Township did not intend to request an MZO, and would prefer to deal with this matter through its Official Plan rather than an MZO.<sup>1</sup> Mayor Clarke said expressly that "we have not asked for an MZO at this time" and that the Township's communication with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing was intended to serve "only as the initial engagement to provoke discussion."<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, it is clear that one of the documents sent to the Minister, Steve Clark, as part of your Rama Road Economic Employment District package was an MZO request. The only way to give effect to the mayor's stated intention is to remedy this error by formally withdrawing that MZO request and informing the Minister directly that Ramara wishes to proceed instead according to the standard planning processes outlined in the *Planning Act*, which include public consultation.

Our organizations are strongly opposed to the use of MZOs to sidestep planning processes intended to protect the environment and ensure meaningful public engagement in planning decisions. We are alarmed by the "sharp increase" in the use of MZOs over the past year, noted by the Auditor General of Ontario.<sup>3</sup> MZOs are issued without public notice or consultation or the

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<sup>1</sup> Nathan Taylor, February 8, 2021, "Ramara mayor says no MZO has been requested for Rama Road project," Orilliamatters.com.

<sup>2</sup> Nathan Taylor, February 8, 2021.

<sup>3</sup> Auditor General of Ontario, November 2020, *Operation of the Environmental Bill of Rights*, p. 18.

right to appeal, and for this reason should be used sparingly and judiciously, according to their original purpose. Specifically, they should not be used except in locations where there are no municipal plans or bylaws in place (unorganized townships which have no land use planning controls), or where there is an extraordinary and emergent provincial interest.

According to the Canadian Environmental Law Association, most if not all of the recent MZOs “have applied in municipalities that already have official plans and zoning by-laws in place,” opening the door to controversial developments on agricultural lands and significant natural areas.<sup>4</sup> Such is the case with the MZO requested by your Council, which would be inconsistent with the Provincial Policy Statement, 2020 (section 2.1.4) that strictly prohibits development on provincially significant wetlands.

We fail to understand why Ramara Township would consider moving forward with a development that would destroy provincially significant wetlands, whether through an MZO or otherwise. Wetlands play a critical role in purifying water, providing opportunities for cultural and recreational pursuits, and supporting fisheries and wildlife (including about 20 percent of Ontario’s species at risk). In addition, they store carbon and control flooding and are thus of utmost importance in mitigating and enhancing community resilience to climate change. On this last point, Ontario’s Special Advisor on flooding noted in 2019 both the increasing frequency and intensity of extreme rainfall events and the importance of wetlands in reducing associated flood damages and financial losses.<sup>5</sup> The strict protections afforded by the Provincial Policy Statement are meant to ensure that these immense benefits are available for communities now and in the future.

We were heartened to read that Mayor Basil Clarke agrees with us that Ramara residents deserve meaningful opportunities to participate in planning decisions affecting your community. However, those sentiments are not enough. There is every reason to expect that Ramara residents will be stripped of control unless you act immediately and formally withdraw the MZO request sent to the Minister for the Rama Road developments.

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours truly,



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<sup>4</sup> Canadian Environmental Law Association, Letter re. ERO# 019-2811, submitted to Planning Consultation, Provincial Planning Policy Branch, Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing on January 19, 2021, p. 6.

<sup>5</sup> Ontario’s Special Advisor on Flooding Report to Government, *An Independent Review of the 2019 Flood Events in Ontario*, p. 113.