

Agenda Number: 11.3.3.
Resolution No. 319-21-2025
Date: Monday, December 8, 2025

Moved by: Deputy Mayor Jennifer Shaw
Seconded by: Councillor Moiken Penner

WHEREAS the Conservation Authorities Act enables municipalities to establish local conservation authorities, and when municipalities choose to form such authorities, they assume responsibility for governance and funding through the appointment of a Board of Directors and the provision of an annual levy to cover expenses; and

WHEREAS the Municipality of Arran-Elderslie is unique in that it contains two watershed jurisdictions within its boundaries, being served by both the Saugeen Valley Conservation Authority (SVCA) and the Grey Sauble Conservation Authority (GSCA); and

WHEREAS the municipalities within Grey and Bruce Counties established the North Grey Region Conservation Authority in 1957 and the Sauble Valley Conservation Authority in 1958, which amalgamated into the Grey Sauble Conservation Authority (GSCA) in 1985; and

WHEREAS the municipalities within Bruce, Grey, Huron, and Wellington Counties established the Saugeen Valley Conservation Authority in 1950, which has since grown through collaboration and amalgamation with neighbouring conservation entities to form the present-day SVCA; and

WHEREAS local municipalities currently provide approximately 44% of total GSCA and SVCA funding, while the Province of Ontario provides approximately 7%; and 1% respectively

WHEREAS municipalities have governed their respective conservation authorities for decades, tailoring programs and services to local watershed needs, maintaining accountable service standards, and ensuring fair and predictable costs for ratepayers; and

WHEREAS conservation authorities collectively own and manage thousands of hectares of land, much of which was donated or sold by local residents and entrusted to conservation authorities as a personal legacy for long-term protection, stewardship, and the public good, with the expectation that such lands would be cared for by locally governed conservation authorities; and

WHEREAS Bill 68 (Schedule 3) proposes the creation of the Ontario Provincial Conservation Agency whose objects include overseeing conservation authorities and the transition to a regional watershed-based framework for conservation authorities in Ontario with municipal cost contribution yet to be defined; and

WHEREAS the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks has posted Environmental Registry Notice No. 025-1257 ("Proposed Boundaries for the Regional Consolidation of Ontario's Conservation Authorities"), proposing to reduce Ontario's 36 conservation authorities to 7 regional entities as part of a broader restructuring; and

WHEREAS under this proposal, both the SVCA and GSCA would be consolidated into a new "Huron Superior Regional Conservation Authority" that is over 23,000 square kilometres in size and consists of 80 municipalities, and

WHEREAS the Province already has the authority to establish overarching legislation, regulations and standards through the Conservation Authorities Act and the Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks to address issues related to permitting, by establishing guidance, online permitting platforms and technical standards through legislation that could help build homes; and

WHEREAS the SVCA and GSCA have already undertaken significant modernization work aligned with provincial objectives, including Information Technology / Information Management, and leveraging technology to streamline planning and permit review processes,

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Municipality of Arran-Elderslie calls on the Government of Ontario to maintain local, independent, municipally governed, watershed-based conservation authorities to ensure strong local representation in decisions related to municipal levies, community-focused service delivery, and the protection and management of conservation lands; and

THAT the Municipality of Arran-Elderslie does not support the proposed "Huron-Superior Regional Conservation Authority" boundary configuration outlined in Environmental Registry Notice 025-1257 as the proposal lacks sufficient justification, would significantly diminish local governance, and fails to recognize the effectiveness and efficiencies already achieved within existing watershed-based models; and

THAT the Municipality of Arran-Elderslie affirms that large-scale regional consolidation is unnecessary, would introduce substantial transition costs, and would divert resources away from frontline watershed programs. The Council further asserts that restructuring at this scale would erode local decision-making, weaken municipal accountability, and disrupt long-standing community partnerships that are central to delivering responsive watershed management; and

THAT while the Municipality of Arran-Elderslie supports provincial goals for consistent permit approval processes, shared services, and digital modernization, imposing a new top-down approach structure without strong local accountability and governance risks creating unnecessary cost, red-tape, and bureaucracy, thereby undermining efficiency and responsiveness to local community needs; and

THAT the Municipality of Arran-Elderslie urges the Province to strengthen centralized standards, resources, and tools rather than undertaking broad structural amalgamation and to provide sustainable, predictable provincial funding across conservation authorities to enable local CAs to advance ongoing digitization and systemization work that has already resulted in improved efficiency and consistency in recent years; and

THAT the Municipality of Arran-Elderslie believes that the Province's proposed new online permitting portal can be implemented within the existing conservation authority framework without requiring structural amalgamation; and

THAT the Municipality of Arran-Elderslie requests that the Ministry engage meaningfully and collaboratively with affected municipalities, conservation authorities, and local First Nations before advancing any consolidation, to ensure that any changes reflect both local needs and the practical realities of implementation; and

THAT this resolution be included in the Municipality's ERO response and forwarded to the Premier of Ontario, the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks, all of Ontario's municipalities, MPPs, conservation authorities, AMO, and Conservation Ontario.

Carried