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**NEWS**

# NVCA approves agreement that calls for role clarification

BY MATTHEW TALBOT  
STAFF

Essa Mayor David Guergis has withdrawn a motion to dissolve the Nottawasaga Valley Conservation Authority (NVCA) after getting a glimpse of the first draft of a policy that would steer how the authority deals with its 18 member municipalities.

The NVCA unanimously approved the draft policy at its monthly board meeting on Friday and will now bring the template to other member municipalities and begin a process to craft specific agreements for each.

CAO Wayne Wilson said the policy will focus on how people could work together "rather than being less cooperative ... and not working together to protect the environment."

"If you want to fish in Essa and you don't protect the river upstream and downstream, you won't have any salmon here," Wilson said.

The draft policy was first publicly discussed at Essa Township's meeting Wednesday, the same evening Essa was to discuss a motion to dissolve the NVCA.

The draft policy is called the NVCA-Municipal Streamlining Partnership Agreement for Plan Review and Technical Clearance and Fee Collection.

Wilson called the plan "a very important communications document."

It describes processes for land-use planning, clarifies the roles of the NVCA's planning and regulations program and outlines fee collection.

"The conservation authority has to charge a fee for planning services because we no longer receive the funds from the province we used to," Wilson said in an interview after presenting the draft policy.

At a Sept. 16 Essa council meeting when council deferred Mayor David Guergis' motion to dissolve the NVCA a second time, Wilson noted the conservation authority

was working on the document.

At that same meeting, Guergis said, "In all fairness, we can't just blame the authorities. The province, in the 1990s, took their funding away. They have to generate their own revenue."

Among several other terms, the draft policy clearly states the NVCA will set fees and will collect them through its member municipalities. The policy says, "The municipality shall collect the base application fee, and remit any fees collected in a timely manner with the application to the NVCA."

"...the NVCA shall be responsible for collecting any further processing/approvals/and/or additional fees as required."

Wilson said the NVCA is looking for community involvement, in addition to political involvement, in creating a final version of the policy. "We'd like as many people as is reasonable on the committee, but as many people as might be affected," he said.

"We're hoping... within two to three months that we can at least get draft agreements with each of our municipalities."

It's no secret the NVCA has been at odds with the Township of Essa. Wilson said this draft policy could be the thing that revives cooperation between the conservation authority and municipalities.

Wilson said the authority received several letters of support while it faced the dissolution motion. He said the discussion with Essa at its Oct. 7 council meeting about the new policy was "polite and courteous".

"Historically, Essa council has been very supportive of the NVCA," Wilson said. "... We're having a little bit of a road bump now but we can get over that."

He called the draft policy the "vehicle to get us over that roadblock."

Later that evening, Guergis withdrew his motion to dissolve the NVCA, but tabled a new motion calling for a third party review of the conservation authority.

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