

The Honourable Jeff Yurek  
Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks  
College Park 5th Flr, 777 Bay St,  
Toronto, ON M7A 2J3

September 27, 2019

RE: In support of museums in Conservation Authorities, in regards to Bill 108 and expressions of 'core mandate'

Dear Minister Yurek,

The letter sent to Conservation Authorities on August 16, 2019, states that the passing of Bill 108 will require Conservation Authorities to “re-focus their efforts on the delivery of programs related to their core mandate.”

Recent media coverage and discussions with members have brought the possible impact of these changes in Conservation Authority (CA) operations to the attention of the Ontario Museum Association (OMA).

The letter of August 16 has led some Conservation Authorities to examine how the work of their museums may or may not fit into the prescribed “core mandate”. A recent public meeting about possible changes for the R. Tait McKenzie Museum at the Mill of Kintail Conservation Area in Almonte brought to the forefront the public support for these sites and their work. In response to serious concerns about the loss of local history the community of Mississippi Mills is rallying around the Museum in order to maintain its operations and valuable contributions at the current site and heritage building.

A number of Ontario’s 700 museums are governed by Conservation Authorities (CAs). These museums and heritage sites contribute to the work that CAs do for their communities, and support provincial objectives for education and increased tourism. Many of Ontario’s 36 CAs also provide heritage activities and education programs that deepen the connections between their resource management work and the province’s natural and cultural heritage. It is the position of the Ontario Museum Association that the museums, heritage sites, interpretation, and education work of Conservation Authorities merit support,.

We encourage consultation with the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport and your colleague the Honourable Lisa MacLeod about the significant contributions of these places to Ontario.

Museums and heritage sites encourage visitors to choose conservation areas: For example, John R. Park Homestead was awarded Best Museum / Heritage Space by Tourism Windsor Essex Pelee Island for both 2018 and 2019. Fanshawe Pioneer Village was developed sixty years ago to enhance the visitor experience of the adjacent conservation area. Conservation Ontario includes “Heritage/Museum” and “Education/Interpretation” as desired, searchable types of activities in conservation areas on their website, where several first-person stories highlight the important role that these heritage sites play in enhancing family visits. Westfield Heritage Village and Black Creek Pioneer Village, for example, have been developing new ticketing and access methods in order to welcome increasing numbers of visitors to their popular family programs. The museums and heritage sites of the province’s Conservation Authorities record close to 500,000 visitors per year, often bringing thousands of people to special events in rural areas in off-peak tourist seasons. Premier Ford has shared his own positive experiences and happy memories of visiting Black Creek Pioneer Village in North York: similar positive experiences are shared by millions of people in Ontario. These sites and their programs are assets to their community and should be supported and encouraged to continue.

Like Black Creek Pioneer Village and Westfield Heritage Village, many Conservation Authority-governed heritage sites are in close proximity to large urban centres, and facilitate connections with nature and culture that may not otherwise be possible. Particularly in regards to Indigenous heritage, the historical ways in which our lands and waterways were used and developed tell important stories of protecting and preserving the environment. These places also often serve to connect newcomers to the province with Ontario’s history; developing a sense of belonging. Conservation Authorities that make heritage and cultural experiences a part of their functions have significant impacts for their communities and their vitality.

If requiring Conservation Authorities to re-focus on their “core mandate” means a loss of these vital places and programs, the people of Ontario will be losing a valuable part of their communities.

The Ontario Museum Association welcomes the opportunity to speak with you, Minister Yurek, and Minister MacLeod, and we request full consideration of the museums and heritage sites operating within or alongside Conservation Authorities as any changes to CA operations are enacted.



Sincerely,



Petal Furness  
President  
(Museum Manager, Grey Roots Museum & Archives)

cc: The Honourable Lisa MacLeod  
Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport

Paul Robertson  
Vice President, Ontario Museum Association  
(City Curator, Cultural Services, City of Kingston)

Marie G. Lalonde  
Executive Director, Ontario Museum Association

