

Karen Chafe

From: Sharpe, Jonathan <jonathansharpe@gov.nl.ca>
Sent: Monday, May 13, 2024 4:07 PM
To: CityClerk
Cc: Sheilagh O'Leary; Ken O'Brien
Subject: Feedback on Amendment # 36, 2024

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Dear Mayor and Council (City of St John's)
Via the Office of the City Clerk,

Please accept the following as feedback on St John's Development Regulations Amendment #36, 2024 and the policy discussions which led to this decision.

First, I commend council on seeking to conserve riparian buffers on city wetlands and waterbodies. This is indeed an important aspect of land management for all the various ecological and societal values that wetlands and waterbodies provide for your residents.

In relation to recommended wetland/waterbody buffers being proposed by the City, I note that the retention of 15m buffers is already the required Lands Act (Section 7) setback on all crown lands of the province. More significantly, the standard provincial recommendation on future land use applications (EA and ILUC) impacting crown lands is that a 30m buffer be maintained on all waterbodies and wetlands.

I am pleased to see the city and its consultants using the WESP-AC for assessing wetland functional significance. I worked with the protocol's creator, to calibrate its use specifically for here in NL- in other words WESP-NL.

Notably, the WESP-AC/NL protocol purposely does not provide a mechanism for weighting values and providing an overall score for any particular wetland. What WESP does do, is provide scores on various ecological functions/values that a wetland provides and indicates whether that tested wetland provides/performs each of those functions better, or worse, than the "average" wetland of that same type. To assuage political decision-making purposes, there have been a number of efforts across North America to establish methods by which WESP data can be weighted and therefore arrive at an overall wetland score.... to assist/provide data in support of what in reality, remains a political development decision. In this case, it appears city staff chose an approach being utilized in Alberta to group functional scores and weight (in a standard way right across the board) the WESP data collected by your consultants.

- I note here in relation to your decision to take a standard across the board approach that it is possible that an entity, such as the city, might value one or more specific functions over others provided by the wetland. For example, in the downtown, one might weigh/value the wetland function of "flood control" as far more important than the biodiversity benefits/functions a wetland provides. As such, a wetland that falls below your overall scoring threshold may provide values in some functional categories on a very high basis but score low overall due to other categories. In this way, your future decision on that wetland's protection fate could be quite different if you weigh/assess that flood control (as one example) is what will drive our decisions, as opposed to an overall score.

Finally, it appears the City, perhaps looking at the sum of data provided, chose a minimum threshold- overall wetland score by which it would protect or not protect wetlands when faced with future development applications. At a final council meeting on the “policy”, a decision was made to increase the overall wetland score threshold from 5 to 6. This obviously will exclude a significant number of wetlands from the need for future protection under the policy created and, as stated above, ignores, or at least minimizes, possible wetland values/functions that the city may wish to consider in decision making.

I am concerned about the precedent the city has set in the province for applying this weighting mechanism/policy to WESP data, in that future developers could utilize such an approach to justify development of wetlands.

Utilizing summarized WESP data, in isolation, as a sole decision maker (protect or not protect) is not an approach I would recommend. A better approach to wetland policy, recognized across North America is to, first seek avoidance of development impacts by establishing clear vision/policy and centrally, areas where development will not be considered. Making this your priority provides clarity to developers and avoids conflicts and the associated crisis decision making. The second component of sound wetland management policy is where we currently spend most of our time, which is mitigating demonstratable unavoidable impacts to wetlands. This is where having established mechanisms of responding to development can be helpful (which is what the city is attempting through this initiative). Lastly a sound wetland policy considers the concept of offset or compensation for losses of nonrenewable wetland resources to development, as is in place across much of the rest of the developed world.

Should the city wish to discuss municipal wetland policy further, I would be glad to meet with you to consider possible approaches.

Jon

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Karen Chafe

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, May 28, 2024 6:11 AM
To: CityClerk
Subject: Wetlands proposal

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Good morning, I would like for the proposal to change wetlands to unprotected by default to be rejected. Simply allowing this law change will only cause abuse by many bad actors in the long run. The environment should be protected more now than ever before.

Karen Chafe

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, May 29, 2024 7:06 PM
To: CityClerk
Subject: Save the Wetlands

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Good evening,

In a time of global mass destruction, it is even more critical we preserve and protect our sacred lands. I'm desperately asking St. John's reconsider the decision to remove this protection from our wet lands that are home to millions of life forms which help keep our air and environments some of the cleanest in the world! This decision will impact not just our community but our children and generations after.

SAVE OUR WETLANDS!

Karen Chafe

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, May 28, 2024 6:45 AM
To: CityClerk
Subject: Wetlands

[REDACTED]

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Hi I'm writing to say I'm opposed to the changes regarding wetlands. Please educate the city and it's employees.

[REDACTED]

Karen Chafe

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Sunday, May 26, 2024 8:41 PM
To: CityClerk
Subject: Comments regarding Wetland Text and Map Amendment, Number 36 2024

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To whom it may concern,

I wish to voice my outrage and opposition to the proposed changes coming into effect to how wetlands are protected in our city. While I was pleased to learn of the council's vote in 2020 to protect these important ecologies, it is now clear to me that this was merely a prelude to facilitate reclassification and development. Besides being important watersheds and homes to countless wildlife, wetlands also sequester carbon on an ongoing basis, and the carbon footprint of developments would include the lost CO2 capturing potential in near perpetuity. In other words, the effects will be with us for centuries. In a day and age when we are already feeling the effects of climate change, to pass such a legacy onto our children and grandchildren is heinous, and what, for a quick buck? If more housing is needed, rezone existing land for higher density, or tax land on which idle commercial real estate sits to encourage its sale.

Furthermore, I feel that the city has put in a minimal amount of effort when it comes to public consultation. To say that the public was notified in The Telegram shows how out of touch the city is with the people who live in this city. And to give the public a mere 18 days shows that this was intended to go under the radar and open a quick backdoor for developers.

Karen Chafe

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Sunday, May 26, 2024 11:41 AM
To: CityClerk
Subject: Regarding proposed Section 4.10 changes "Waterways, Wetlands, Ponds, or Lakes".

[REDACTED]

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Dear St. John's Council members,

I hope all is well. Thank you for serving our city.

I'm writing regarding the proposed amendments to the Envision St. John's Development Regulations, specifically Section 4.10 "Waterways, Wetlands, Ponds or Lakes".

I feel that the proposed change is one of the most aggressive reversals of environmental protections that has been proposed in living memory.

Although it is presented as a positive environmental action (stating that it is "adding" protected status to two new areas), it in fact does the complete opposite, and *removes* the existing protected status of nearly all wetlands in the City. With the proposed change, the new default status is "unprotected" unless a future field study indicates that a WESP-AC score of 6 or higher is attained. Moreover, there are existing wetland areas that would immediately be assigned unprotected status, having already been assigned a WESP-AC score below 6.

Worse still is that all future explicit assignment of "unprotected" status could then occur practically silently, with no further public engagement, as each new Field Assessment is completed.

Are all members of Council aware of the real implications of this change?

We need to be so careful when removing such protections, because, once removed by us living today, they will remain removed for everyone who comes after us. St. John's will slowly repeat the harsh de-greening lessons that so many other Canadian cities regret today.

Like many citizens of St. John's, the duties of my existing full-time job cause me to feel powerless compared to the ever-present pressures from land developers whose full-time job is to advocate for such changes. We look to and need Council to balance the bias from that, effectively, private-sector paid messaging.

Most sincerely,

[REDACTED]

Karen Chafe

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, May 28, 2024 9:12 AM
To: CityClerk
Subject: Regarding wetlands proposal

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Dear City of St. John's Council Members,

I am writing regarding the "Development Regulations Amendment - Wetlands" proposal.

Wetlands are extremely important for biodiversity, prevention of flooding and droughts, as well as climate change.

Rather than developing an easily skewed scoring system to remove protections, we should be ensuring that we are protecting more wetlands, regardless of their economic value.

As a teenager I am concerned about the continued impact of decisions such as this one on the environment. I want St. John's to be a place where we are conscious of these impacts, and where future residents can enjoy having these places protected throughout the city, both for their beauty and their environmental importance.

I urge you to reject this proposal for myself and all future residents of St. John's.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]

Karen Chafe

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, May 31, 2024 8:17 AM
To: CityClerk
Subject: Wetlands protection

Dear City Clerk,

I oppose the proposed changes to the wetlands protection.

It is a serious backward step that ignores the ecological importance and environmental significance of our wetlands.

As a community and city we should be doing more to protect or wetlands and nature in general not reducing protection of what is scientifically critical for the health of environment and ecological system.

Also, this is a bizarre move by a city council who has declared recognition of environmental emergency. Developers have to much leeway here. The need for greater boundaries exist.

Progress can happen without backpedaling on protection. Many places in the world have proven so.

This must not happen and I fully oppose this questionable, backward and damaging attempt to lessen the protection of the wetlands.

Thank you,
[REDACTED]

Sent from my iPhone

Karen Chafe

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, May 28, 2024 8:57 AM
To: CityClerk

[REDACTED]

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Good morning,

My name is [REDACTED] I've lived here in St. John's my whole life. I feel that removing protections from the wetlands would be a terrible decision. It gives us a layer of protection by slowing down the spread of wildfires. There are also many species that inhabit these spaces, it doesn't seem right to pave over their homes. We should take pride in the aspect of nature that we still have here as opposed to covering it up at every opportunity. I've seen woods that I would explore in when I was younger torn down and replaced with roads and houses it's heartbreaking to see. I hope you will consider all the factors surrounding this decision and come to the conclusion that the wetlands should be protected.

Karen Chafe

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, May 27, 2024 11:52 PM
To: CityClerk
Subject: Proposed Amendment to Wetland Designation

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To Whom It May Concern,

I have reviewed the proposed amendment to city's wetland designation.

This is concerning in a city that lacks adequate green space. This green space is not only important for human enjoyment but also for maintaining a healthy ecosystem. The city's storm drainage is already having negative environmental impacts to St. John's waterways.

This is evident in the Rennie's River water system. This water system is discoloured and at times has a foul smell. Further cutting our natural wetland space will aggravate this pollution problem.

I am opposed to changing the city's wetland policy. This policy change will negatively affect the city's ecosystem that is already under significant strain.

Thank you,

[REDACTED]

Karen Chafe

From: [REDACTED]
Sent:
To: CityClerk
Subject: Regulatory changes to wetlands

[REDACTED] [Learn why this is important](#)

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Hello,

I am writing to voice my opposition to the proposed regulatory changes that remove protections from over 90% of all wetlands in the city of St. John's.

These changes represent a significant weakening of environmental protections in the city, specifically to wetlands, which are currently protected by default. This proposal will remove the default protected status and enables future changes to wetland protection status to be made quietly, simply by completing an assessment by a field team, without future notice to the public, which I oppose.

We must put forward regulations that protect diverse natural habitats within the city, including wetlands.

Best regards,

[REDACTED]

Karen Chafe

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, May 28, 2024 5:12 PM
To: CityClerk
Subject: Wetland Bylaw Change

[REDACTED]

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Hi there,

I'm writing today to comment on the proposed by-law changes that will essentially remove protections from over 90% of all wetlands in the city..

These environmental protections were in place in the city for generations for good reason!

I do not agree with making any wetland less than a 6 when assessed, unprotected. This is disrespectful to the wonderful environmental work we have ongoing in the province.

Thanks

Karen Chafe

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, May 27, 2024 11:07 AM
To: CityClerk; Jill Bruce; Sheilagh O'Leary
Subject: Opposition to changes to Protection of Wetlands in the city

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Good morning, I'm writing to voice my opposition to changes to the protections of city wetlands. We resent having to find out this information via a sponsored post on Facebook - residents of the city deserve to be informed directly, and communication by the city to constituents is abysmal. It is very concerning that the city wants to remove protection for wetlands, especially if it is in the interest of furthering residential and commercial development - which, in my experience with the city and with living adjacent to a wetland, it probably is. Environmental protection is more important than ever, and it is disgraceful that the city would go in the opposite direction and remove protection! Please reconsider these changes.

Karen Chafe

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, May 27, 2024 6:51 PM
To: CityClerk

[REDACTED]

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In a world that is screaming “climate change “ it blows my mind that the City would even consider contributing to its demise. We need wet lands for many reasons, water filtration, ecosystems diversity and helping with co2 scrubbing .

Do not remove the protected lands laws. This move will not look good on this council.

Karen Chafe

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, May 27, 2024 7:52 AM
To: CityClerk
Subject: Text and Map Amendment - Wetlands

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VOTE NO

As seen on the comparison map, this is going to remove protection from a large amount of wetland in the city. We should be protecting more areas not unprotecting them!

I have nothing but negative things to say about this proposal. VOTE NO

[REDACTED]

Good day,

I am writing in response to Text and Map Amendment – Wetlands comment period.

According to the map the wetlands area around Barrows Road is designated as unprotected. I am trying to better understand the rationale and wonder what steps we can take as citizens to advocate for its protection.

According to the supplemental Wetlands Study – Phase 2a – Adopted November 28, 2023 the BAR1 – Basin Marsh area is scored at 3.55 which included “higher” scores for the following wetland functions:

- Streamflow Support
- Water Cooling
- Organic Nutrient Export
- Aquatic Invertebrate Habitat
- Amphibian Habitat

I live [REDACTED] wetland and have observed a variety of wildlife, including ducks in particular who live and feed in this area. There are several pairs of ducks who live, feed and nest in this area, as well as other wetlands in the [REDACTED] area. I have pictures and videos of ducks and their ducklings in both [REDACTED]. There have also been beavers living in [REDACTED] and built a dam. Given my observations as a resident in the area, I am surprised that other ecological categories were not noted, such as:

- Waterbird Feeding Habitat
- Waterbird Nesting Habitat
- Songbird, Raptor & Mammal Habitat

Could you provide more details in whether the presence of wildlife beyond aquatic invertebrates and amphibians were noted in [REDACTED]? If not, why not? Could you provide further detail on what was included to provide a score of 3.55 for [REDACTED]?

Additionally, could you provide more information on the buffer recommendation in that report? For [REDACTED] the report notes:

“Buffer Recommendation:

Maintenance of a 20 m buffer is recommended for this wetland due to its association with a watercourse. Residential development along [REDACTED] already extends into the area corresponding to the buffer zone to the north, however, space exists to manage a 20 m vegetated buffer around the remainder of the wetland’s perimeter.”

I understand that this is a recommendation. Has it been adopted and accepted by council? Would you be able to provide a map (or ariel photo like Figure A1 in Wetlands Study – Phase 2a – Adopted November 28, 2023) that identifies the 20m mark around [REDACTED]? How does it work if the wetland itself [REDACTED] is designated as “unprotected”, yet the report recommends a 20m buffer around the

remainder of its perimeter? Does that mean that future developments will not be permitted within the wetland and the 20m buffer?

I appreciate the City of St. John's conducting this important work to designate and protect wetland areas. For future studies the City should consider contacting residents in neighbouring areas directly for input through public consultation – rather than simply posting on the City's website or through the Telegram – to ensure residents are aware and have an opportunity to provide comment.

Thank you for your time and I hope to hear from you soon.

