**ONTARIO WETLAND EVALUATION SYSTEM**

On behalf of the County of Middlesex, I thank you for the opportunity to provide input on the proposed More Homes Built Faster Act and related Provincial changes. This submission relates to the proposed changes to the Ontario Wetland Evaluation System.

It is acknowledged that the provision of housing is important and that municipalities play a key role in increasing the supply of housing while building complete and sustainable communities. Even a few years ago the question of housing affordability would have been a low priority for our community as this challenge was largely an issue for our large urban neighbour. This is no longer the case as our rural and small urban County has significant housing affordability and attainability challenges that in many respects have outpaced our urban neighbour.

Through the proposed updates to the Ontario Wetland Evaluation System, we understand that municipalities would be delegated the responsibility to review and approve OWES evaluations and maintain wetland boundaries. It would also appear that the current approach, which is largely science-based, to support the long term protection and conservation of wetlands would be significantly changed including matters related to endangered and threatened species and ecosystem complexing.

Under the current model, the Province is primarily responsible for the approval of OWES evaluations. Should the Province undertake to move this authority, it would be our recommendation that this authority be assumed by the conservation authorities given that the maintenance of wetland information is directly related to their core mandate. This would maintain existing efficiencies and use existing capacity and expertise. It would also support other mandatory conservation authority programs including the regulation of hazard lands, and the preparation of watershed management plans and related programs.

Yours truly,



Bill Rayburn

 Chief Administrative Officer