

Democratic rights are being squandered and lost along with precious land

A provincial law change that curtailed third-party groups' ability to appeal development decisions has left environmental and ratepayer groups saying they've been silenced.

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Letters to the Editor

[Environmental and residents groups call new provincial rules barring OLT third-party appeals an attack on 'citizen rights,' Aug. 6](#)

With my community, I was part of an Ontario Joint Board hearing (now known as the Ontario Land Tribunal) that successfully protected source water and endangered species from a gravel mining proposal on Mount Nemo in Burlington, Ont. We hired independent experts to make our case, and the evidence we presented was instrumental in the board's decision to deny the quarry. As citizens, we had real stake in the outcome. Our well water, air quality and surrounding environment were at risk. Removing a community's right to participate threatens to remove decision maker's access to the on-the-ground knowledge and concerns of locals. Developers have the right to appeal local government decisions to the OLT. Taking away citizen's equal rights encourages poorer planning and riskier development. The Cutting Red Tape to Build More Homes Act (Bill 185) bolsters corporate dominance, and renders the democratic voice of the people mute.

Sarah Harmer, Burlington

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Reporter Noor Javed's excellent article about new rules barring OLT third party appeals illustrates how our democratic rights are being trampled. The anger is growing daily in this region about Premier Doug Ford's hypocritical statements about "governing for the people" as precious farmland and natural spaces are being squandered and lost. Our community of Ball's Bridge and Little Lakes Road in southwestern Ontario has invested years of time and thousands of dollars to try to protect a natural area well loved by the public. We have been abandoned by our local council and have now been abandoned by the provincial government.

Rebecca Garrett, Goderich, Ont.

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Bill 185 denies citizens groups from speaking up to protect our precious places. Is this this fair? Is this democratic? Absolutely not. We must fight for our right to be heard!

Wendy Hoernig, Goderich, Ont.

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Since the enactment of Bill 185, the right of citizen groups to influence, challenge or contest planning decisions pushed by developers has been stripped away. This egregious action continues to erode our civil society and our democratic process. This seems to be the unspoken Tory agenda. We are "Open for Business" but only for those who are developers. This is hardly "a government for the people." The worst kind of hypocrisy is to claim citizens are holding up development through appeals when the data shows that many of the appeals recorded over the past decade are by the developers themselves. Shame on the Ontario Conservatives for their attack on democracy. Shame on MPP Jill Dunlop for supporting this. Bill 185 must be repealed.

David Jeffery, Tiny, Ont.