



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Collingwood residents organize to stop destruction of Town's globally rare and environmentally sensitive wetlands**

**Collingwood, ON Wednesday August 1, 2018** A large Toronto-based developer is seeking approval from the local government to construct a **new five-storey, 889-person conference centre with an adjoining six storey hotel, parking for over 350 cars (including the town's first multi-level, above-ground parking lot) all on a site that abuts an Environmentally Protected Wetland Area of Georgian Bay. Even though the Environmentally Protected area contains wetlands designated by the Province of Ontario as "Class 1 Provincially Significant Wetlands", the conference centre would be located a mere 1.2 meters from its border.**

The protected wetlands contain pristine ecological habitat that is home to numerous species of birds, fish, mammals and turtles, including snapping turtles which are protected and classified as being of "Special Concern" under the Province's Endangered Species Act. Even the Town of Collingwood's Official Plan refers to these wetlands as follows:

*"Category 1 lands, by virtue of their significant functions, attributes and linkages, are those considered to make the greatest contribution to the natural heritage system of the Town of Collingwood..."*

Fearing that Collingwood's Town Council may turn a blind eye on its own Official Plan and ram through approval for the project less than two months before a municipal election, concerned local residents are organizing and pushing back. As part of a community effort to secure responsible development controls around these sensitive wetland areas, residents have formed a new community group called S.O.S. Collingwood (Save Our Shorelines). In addition to writing to their local, provincial and federal politicians, the group has launched a website, a Facebook page and an Instagram account. They have also launched paper-based and on-line petitions. Their paper petition already has more than 700 supporters and their on-line petition through Change.org has in excess of 2,100 supporters.

SOS Collingwood member Jeff Newton says, "Our group is passionate and focused but we aren't naively fighting to block all development, we're fighting for responsible development. Development in this unique area needs to be respectful of the fragile wetlands and its wildlife". Newton added, "To allow this particular development so close to such sensitive ecological habitat just doesn't make any sense, environmentally or economically, especially when there are so many other places it could occur."

SOS Collingwood is particularly concerned with why the Town of Collingwood and the Nottawasaga Valley Conservation Authority have shown so little interest in requiring the developer to do a full Environmental Impact Study (EIS), including a review of alternate development options. While the developer has submitted an EIS "update", SOS Collingwood points out that the report is not a comprehensive EIS one would expect for a project of this size, in this location, and with this impact. As Newton sees it, "It's a short perfunctory update to an original EIS that was done eleven long years



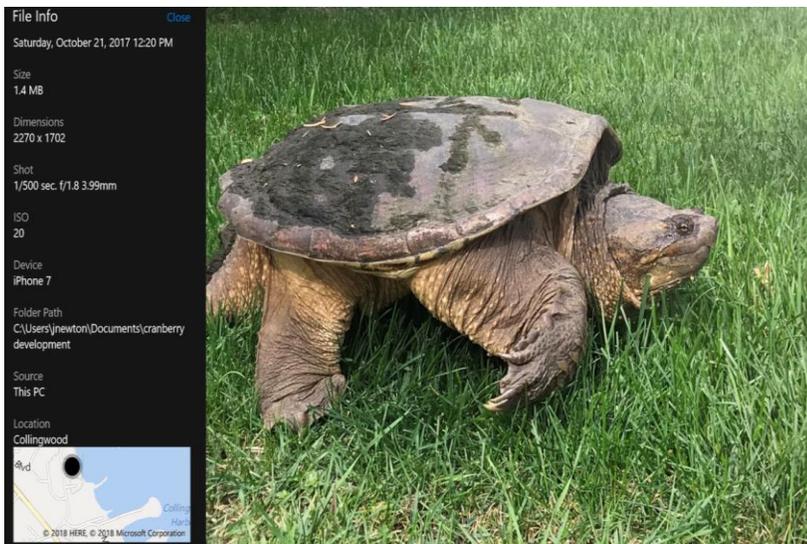
ago in respect of a completely different development phase and at a time when the ecological nature of the abutting wetlands was vastly different”.

Newton also points out that, “The Town’s own EIS guidelines state that an EIS must contain a review of alternative development options and that it must also contain an analysis of opportunities for environmental enhancement. Neither of these are contained in the developer’s perfunctory update”. Newton says, “It’s incomprehensible that the Town isn’t requiring the developer to follow their own guidelines.”

SOS Collingwood also points out that recent correspondence from the NVCA has characterized Collingwood’s wetlands as “globally rare” and “home to a diverse array of species, including species at risk”. If this is how the NVCA sees these wetlands why do they set the bar so low when it comes to their protection?”, questioned Newton.

SOS Collingwood was also shocked to learn that the so-called EIS “Update” only involved a single site visit by the study authors. They were even more shocked to learn that the “update” contains factually incorrect conclusions including the finding that snapping turtle ([www.ontario.ca/page/snapping-turtle](http://www.ontario.ca/page/snapping-turtle)) habitat doesn’t exist in the area. Newton notes: “We have resident’s in the area who have date stamped geo-coded photos of snapping turtles in the area. Those photos were taken only days after the authors of the EIS Update did their single “fly-by” site visit and claim to have seen none. The conclusion that there are no snapping turtles in the area is wrong.”

SOS Collingwood has its sights set on up upcoming August meetings of the Collingwood Town Council and is hoping that other concerned residents will join in the effort. As Newton says, “The Town of Collingwood has it right, these lands really do *make the greatest contribution to the natural heritage system of the Town*. Now they just need to get it right when it comes to protecting them for today and for future generations.”



#### LINKS YOU MIGHT FIND USEFUL

SOS Collingwood Website:  
[www.soscollingwood.ca](http://www.soscollingwood.ca)

Change.org  
Petition: <https://chn.ge/2NyMoZC>

Facebook:  
<https://www.facebook.com/SOSCollingwood>

Instagram: [sos\\_collingwood](https://www.instagram.com/sos_collingwood)