

January 21, 2024

The Northumberland Federation of Agriculture (NFA) represents over 750 farm families across the county. We advocate for the viability of the Northumberland agricultural industry to produce food for our community, the country and the world. Food grown by Canadian farmers has a reputation for being the safest in the world and in Ontario alone, farmers produce over 200 different food products.

During the last week of November 2023, we were made aware of Cobourg's newly created storm water management fee being placed on all properties within the municipality. We have heard from dozens of agricultural landowners, both farmers themselves and landlords, that the fees were astronomical and the timeline for payment, impossible and could result in putting these food producing acres out of production. NFA believes the methods used to calculate the fees being charged are flawed and represent an unjust taxation rather than a user fee. While we understand a user fee can be charged under the Municipal Act, a key consideration is to ensure that there is a connection between the amount of the fee and the cost of the service being provided, such that it is not categorized as a tax.

Agricultural properties have significant pervious areas, where storm water is soaked up like a sponge which then nourishes plants and slowly replenishes creeks, lakes, wetlands and aquifers. Agricultural properties, in fact, offer a service to the Town of Cobourg by absorbing significant amounts of storm water, slowing peak flows and recharging aquifers.

From an agricultural perspective, adjustments need to be applied to "working farms". A "working farm" is a farm property subject to the Farm Property Class Tax Rate, as assessed by the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC). In order to qualify for the Farm Property Class Tax Rate program, landowners must provide proof of Farm Business Registration, and so the Town of Cobourg would have a mechanism to implement this fairly.

We want the more than 600 acres within the municipal limits to be excluded from this fee for service where no service is provided while agriculture land provides additional capacity for absorbing storm water to lessen the burden on storm water infrastructure.

In conclusion, NFA believes these points are a fairer way to support the agricultural landowners, and we urge the Town of Cobourg to consider them. We look forward to working together to find a solution that takes into consideration the benefit of farmland to the Town.

Allan Carruthers  
President  
Northumberland Federation of Agriculture