

From: [Eowyn Spencer](mailto:Eowyn.Spencer@brantfornature@gmail.com)
To: brantfornature@gmail.com
Subject: RE: GRCA Proposal to Close Apps Mill Nature Centre
Date: Monday, December 4, 2023 8:41:00 AM

From: Brant For Nature <brantfornature@gmail.com>

Sent: Tuesday, November 28, 2023 9:50 AM

To: chriswhite1@cogeco.ca; sfoxton@northdumfries.ca; ggardhouse@eastgarafraxa.ca; lhern@wellington-north.ca; swatters@centrewellington.ca; christine.billings@guelph.ca; ken.chew@guelph.ca; douggcraig@icloud.com; devinem@cambridge.ca; jerb@regionofwaterloo.ca; gordon.greavette@rogers.com; cjames@regionofwaterloo.ca; sshantz@regionofwaterloo.ca; nsalonen@regionofwaterloo.ca; kwilliams@regionofwaterloo.ca; pwolf@regionofwaterloo.ca; milverton@pertheast.ca; John.ChallinorII@milton.ca; ward13@hamilton.ca; b.banbury@hotmail.com; brianatbridgeview@gmail.com; jedamiller@sympatico.ca; officeofthemayor@brantford.ca; ginocaputo@brantford.ca; dlawrence@haldimandcounty.on.ca

Subject: GRCA Proposal to Close Apps Mill Nature Centre

November 28, 2023

Re: The GRCA Proposal to Close the Apps Mill Nature Centre

From: Brant For Nature

Dear Chair White and GRCA Board of Directors,

It is our understanding that Grand River Conservation Authority (GRCA) management has recently proposed to close 3 nature centres that serve to offer outdoor education to area school children. The proposal includes moving the education programs at Apps Mill, Taquanyah and Laurel Creek to area Conservation Parks. This plan is something that Brant For Nature strongly opposes, and we believe that the thought behind this recommendation has been rushed, is short sighted, and needs further consultation. There are some questions that need to be answered and there are very good reasons why the proposal to "moth ball" these nature centres should not occur.

Since the opening of the Apps Mill Nature Centre in 1972, it has been a centre for outdoor education for several generations of local school children from Brantford and Brant County. Students from both local school boards participate, and it is the premier location for school children to have hands-on environmental education. Thousands of students have enjoyed their learning experience at these facilities.

The current nature centre at Apps Mill was officially opened in 1981, thanks to a \$350,000 donation from S.C. Johnson and Son. More recently an injection of \$400,000 led to improved accessibility with the installation of a small elevator and accessible washrooms. The centre currently contains a large upper-level conference room, kitchen, staff office and two classrooms in the lower level, outfitted with washrooms for both staff and children. The conference area even houses a host of "live animals" that are an essential part of engaging students with nature's creatures. Hence the Apps Mill Nature Centre stands today as a fixture in our community largely from the support of Brantford's own S.C. Johnson and Son Inc.

It has been mentioned at recent GRCA Board meetings that the facility is aging and in need of a lot of capital repair. We would like to see the details of the capital costs that have been estimated. We believe Apps Mill is currently well suited for children to have a unique experience of learning about environmental science. The current proposal includes moving the education programs to area conservation parks (ie. Brant Park, Pinehurst). These parks have excellent outdoor areas, however, they do not have proper education buildings that

enhance the learning experience immeasurably for young children.

Under the amendments to Bill 229, enacted by the current Conservative Government, we realize Conservation Authorities can no longer charge municipalities a levy for “non-core” Conservation Authority activities (as defined by the legislation) and that includes aspects of operating outdoor education at the Nature Centres. And while the operation side of Apps Mill is largely funded by the local school boards, the capital required to maintain the facilities is not. However the current provincial government did allow time for Conservation Authorities to reach out to municipal governments to seek “other” methods of funding. Bill 229 was introduced in the fall of 2020, and only now the GRCA is seeking a solution to the shortfall.

Recently, Mayor Kevin Davis (City of Brantford) and Councillor David Miller (County of Brant) have been very diligent ensuring that the GRCA does due diligence before tabling this plan to close the Apps Mill Nature Centre. We conclude that further diligence is necessary to keep Apps Mill open so that it can continue to serve our children. There is an urgent need for more consultation with municipal officials, previous donors, school boards, education staff, parents and all stakeholders. We urge all parties to find a solution to this dilemma.

Sincerely,

Tom Sitak,
President,
Brant For Nature.
(on behalf of the Board)

Brant For Nature is a member group of the Ontario Nature Network.

<https://brantfornature.ca>

<https://ontarionature.org>