



Corporate Report

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DATE: April 14, 2008

TO: Chair and Members of Planning and Development Committee
Meeting Date: April 28, 2008

FROM: Edward R. Sajecki
Commissioner of Planning and Building

SUBJECT: **Growing the Greenbelt – Consultation 2008**

RECOMMENDATION: That the report titled “Growing the Greenbelt – Consultation 2008” dated April 14, 2008 from the Commissioner of Planning and Building, be forwarded by the City Clerk to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, the Region of Peel, the City of Brampton and the Town of Caledon.

BACKGROUND: The Greenbelt Plan and Greenbelt boundary were established under the *Greenbelt Act* in 2005. The Greenbelt, as shown in Appendix 1, is a broad band of permanently protected land that includes 700,000 hectares (1.8 million acres) extending 325 km (200 miles) from the eastern end of the Oak Ridges Moraine to the Niagara River. It includes some of the most threatened environmentally sensitive and agricultural lands in the region. In addition to protecting agricultural and environmentally sensitive lands, the Greenbelt Plan improves the linkages between these sensitive areas and the surrounding major lake systems and watersheds. To this end, the Greenbelt Plan recognizes the natural heritage system is connected to systems beyond the Greenbelt. It identifies external connections to Lake Ontario, two of which are the Credit River and the Etobicoke Creek. The external connections are not part of the Greenbelt and, as such, the Greenbelt Act does not apply to Mississauga.

Since the Greenbelt was created in 2005, development pressures have been experienced in areas beyond it, resulting in a “leapfrog effect”. In February, 2007, the Ontario Greenbelt Alliance released the 2nd Greenbelt Report Card which, for the second year in a row, recommended expanding the Greenbelt into areas experiencing the leapfrog effect such as Simcoe, Northumberland and Wellington Counties and Waterloo Region.

In addition, the Greenbelt Council, in February, 2007, provided an advisory letter to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing expressing concern that there may be countryside areas beyond the Greenbelt which exhibit pressures, conditions or other circumstances which warrant extending the protection of the Greenbelt, and requested the Minister to develop criteria for expanding the Greenbelt.

In July, 2007, the Greenbelt Council specifically recommended expansion of the Greenbelt to provide protection for the water quality of Lake Simcoe. Specific to Lake Simcoe, the Province has committed to developing legislation, the Lake Simcoe Protection Act, to protect Lake Simcoe’s water quality.

The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, with other provincial ministries, have developed draft criteria, for public consideration, to evaluate potential municipal requests to expand the Greenbelt. The draft criteria were posted on the Environmental Registry with comments due by April 30, 2008.

The *Greenbelt Act* allows only the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to propose amendments to the Plan and any amendments shall not have the effect of reducing the Greenbelt area. Any expansion to the Greenbelt requires Cabinet approval. The Act also requires a comprehensive policy review of the Greenbelt Plan every 10 years. Consultation on the draft criteria for expanding the Greenbelt is not intended to replace the 10-year review, or limit the ability of the Minister to propose any other amendments to the Plan.

The six draft criteria for evaluating municipal requests for expanding the Greenbelt are:

1. In terms of process and consultation, the municipal request should:
 - be supported by all levels of municipal councils affected by the proposed expansion (i.e. regional, county, single-tier) and there should be consensus among upper and lower-tiers;
 - identify the geographic area for expansion consideration;
 - show that council has engaged the community; and
 - provide supporting rational.
2. The proposed expansion must meet the main purpose of the Greenbelt Plan:
 - consistent with the Greenbelt vision and goals; and
 - to protect environmentally sensitive and agricultural lands while meeting the needs of growing communities.
3. Greenbelt additions should be logical extensions to the Greenbelt and not create isolated patches.
4. The proposed expansion should connect to and build upon the framework established for the Protected Countryside, taking into consideration whether the expansion is:
 - based on provincial-scale systems approach; and
 - build upon the Greenbelt's natural heritage, agricultural and water resources systems.
5. The proposed expansion should complement the Provincial Growth Plan and the municipalities' efforts to bring their Official Plan into conformity with the Growth Plan.
6. The request for expansion should complement and support ongoing provincial initiatives such as Source Water Protection Plans and broader transportation and transit planning.

FINANCIAL IMPACT: Not applicable

CONCLUSION: The six draft criteria developed by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing to consider potential municipal requests for expanding the Greenbelt are consistent with the vision and goals of the Greenbelt Plan and should be supported.

ATTACHMENTS: APPENDIX 1: "Growing the Greenbelt February 2008 Consultation"
Provincial publication

Original Signed By:

Edward R. Sajecki
Commissioner of Planning and Building

Prepared By: Mary Bracken, Environmental Planner



FEBRUARY 2008 | Consultation

INTRODUCTION

Ontarians have come to cherish the Greenbelt since it was created in February 2005. It protects 1.8 million acres of environmentally sensitive and agricultural land around the Greater Golden Horseshoe. Moving forward, growing the Greenbelt can improve Ontarians' quality of life.

The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing has developed some draft criteria for public consideration in order to accommodate potential requests to grow the Greenbelt.

This booklet provides some background information about the Greenbelt and its creation, and outlines draft criteria that could be used by the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to consider municipal requests to expand the existing Greenbelt. Comments and suggestions on these draft criteria are welcome.

BACKGROUND

Providing agricultural and environmental protection, the Greenbelt also contains important natural resources and supports a wide range of recreational, tourism and cultural opportunities.

The Greenbelt helps protect the water we drink and the air we breathe. It offers greenspaces to enjoy hiking and skiing. It preserves farmland so that future generations can enjoy food that is grown and raised close to home.



The Greenbelt includes the Oak Ridges Moraine, the Niagara Escarpment and land that is known as "Protected Countryside" and lies at the heart of the Greater Golden Horseshoe.

The Greenbelt is the cornerstone of the Greater Golden Horseshoe Growth Plan, Ontario's over-arching strategy for managing growth for the area. The Greenbelt Plan identifies where major urban growth cannot take place. The Growth Plan directs most growth to existing urban areas, away from environmentally sensitive and prime agricultural areas.

THE GREENBELT ACT AND PLAN

The Greenbelt Plan and Greenbelt boundary were established under the Greenbelt Act, 2005. The act allows only the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to propose amendments to the Plan. Only Ontario Cabinet can approve those proposals.

Decisions on planning applications must conform to the Greenbelt Plan. Municipalities are also required to bring their planning documents (e.g. official plans) into conformity with the Plan.

The act requires a comprehensive policy review of the Greenbelt Plan every 10 years. The review must be co-ordinated with the reviews of the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan and the Niagara Escarpment Plan. The first 10-year review is to take place by 2015.

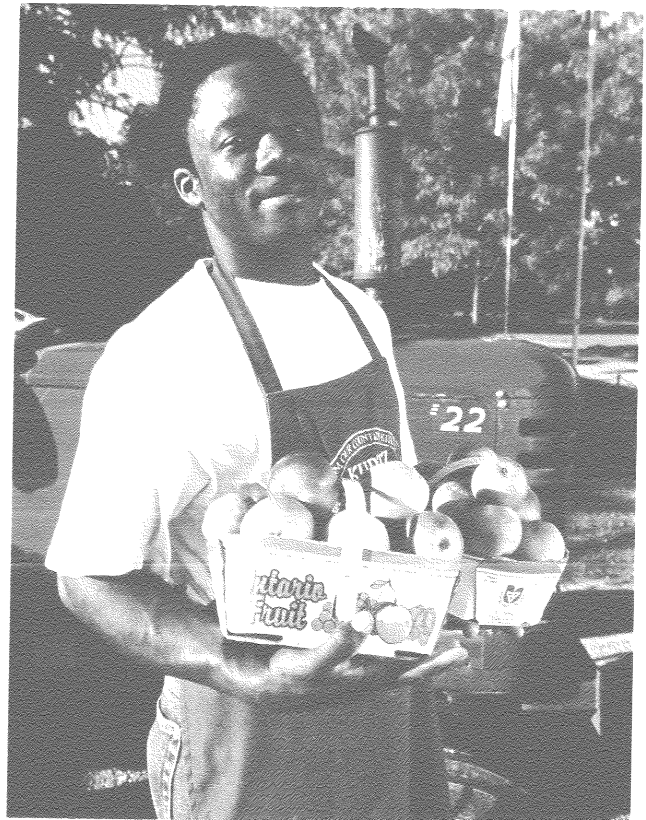
The act also required the government to create the Greenbelt Council, an advisory body to the Minister on Greenbelt matters. The Greenbelt Council provides advice to the Minister on both the 10-year review and any proposed amendments to the Plan.

This consultation on the draft criteria is not intended to replace the 10-year review, or limit the ability of the Minister to propose any other amendments to the Plan. Amendments to the Plan would follow the legislative process outlined in the act.

GREENBELT VISION

The Greenbelt is a broad band of permanently protected land which:

- Protects against the loss and fragmentation of the agricultural land base and supports agriculture as the predominant land use;
- Gives permanent protection to the natural heritage and water resource systems that sustain ecological and human health and that form the environmental framework around which major urbanization in south-central Ontario will be organized; and



- Provides for a diverse range of economic and social activities associated with rural communities, agriculture, tourism, recreation and resource uses.

GREENBELT GOALS

To enhance our urban and rural areas and overall quality of life by promoting the following matters within the Protected Countryside:

1. Agricultural protection
2. Environmental protection
3. Culture, recreation and tourism
4. Settlement areas
5. Infrastructure and natural resources

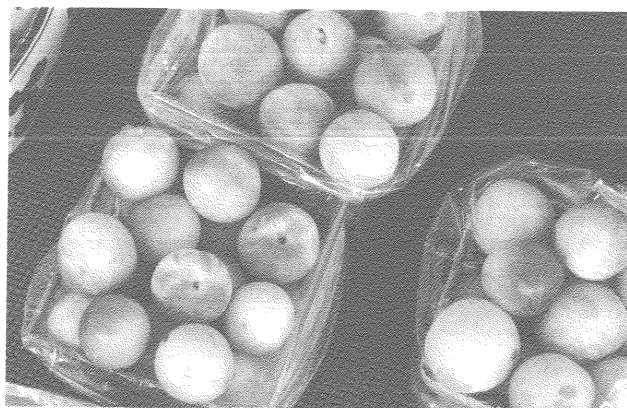
Please refer to the Greenbelt Plan for more information on the Greenbelt's goals.

GREENBELT FACTS

- The Greenbelt includes about 1 million acres of protected land in addition to the land protected by the Niagara Escarpment Plan and the Oak Ridges Moraine Plan. The total area of protected land in the Golden Horseshoe is now 1.8 million acres – an area larger than Prince Edward Island.
- The Greenbelt extends 325 kilometres from the eastern end of the Oak Ridges Moraine near Rice Lake, to the Niagara River in the west. It is about 80 kilometres wide at its widest point from the mouth of the Rouge River to the northern tip of Durham Region.
- The Greenbelt's Protected Countryside natural heritage system is about 535,000 acres in land area and provides full protection for about three-quarters of the lakes, wetlands and forests in the Greenbelt.



- The Greenbelt brings under the Plan the headwaters of all major watersheds in the western Greater Toronto Area that were not protected by the Niagara Escarpment or Oak Ridges Moraine plans.
- The Greenbelt permanently protects about 100,000 acres of Niagara Peninsula tender fruit and grape specialty crop areas and the entire Holland Marsh specialty crop area of over 15,000 acres, located in York Region and Simcoe County.



Draft Expansion Criteria

INTRODUCTION TO DRAFT CRITERIA

The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, working in partnership with other provincial ministries, has developed draft criteria to consider municipal requests to grow the Greenbelt. The ministry is looking for feedback on the following six criteria.

1. Municipal Request

Requests for growing the Greenbelt from regional, county and single-tier municipal governments will be considered.

A municipality requesting to expand the Greenbelt should address the following questions:

- Is the request supported by regional, county or single-tier municipal council?
- Does the request identify the geographic area within the municipality to be considered for addition to the Greenbelt?
- What specific measures has council taken to engage the public and key stakeholder organizations about growing the Greenbelt in its municipality?
- What specific measures has council taken to engage Aboriginal communities about growing the Greenbelt in its municipality?
- Is there consensus among a region or county and its lower-tiers affected by the proposal? Is the request supported by council resolutions?
- Has the municipality provided a supporting rationale as to how the criteria have been met?

2. Embraces Greenbelt Purpose

The Greenbelt establishes its main purpose through the vision and goals outlined on pages 2 and 3. Proposed expansions to the Greenbelt must recognize its key role in guiding land use planning in the Greater Golden Horseshoe and seek to maintain this purpose.

- Does the proposed expansion protect environmentally sensitive and agricultural lands while meeting the needs of growing communities?
- Is it consistent with the vision and goals of the Greenbelt Plan?

3. Additions to the Greenbelt

Greenbelt additions should be logical extensions to its existing area. New lands to be added should be easily connected and not create isolated patches. Further, the Greenbelt Act, 2005 provides that the Greenbelt's area cannot be reduced through an amendment.

- Is the proposed expansion next to the existing Greenbelt?
- Does the proposed expansion consist only of additions to the Greenbelt and not include deletions?

4. Connections to Greenbelt Systems

The Protected Countryside was built using a provincial-scale 'systems approach' described in detail on page 6. Requests to grow the Greenbelt should connect to and build upon this framework that established the original Greenbelt.

- Is the proposed expansion based on a provincial-scale systems approach that formed the original Greenbelt (as opposed to local or regional scales)?
- Does the proposed expansion build upon the Greenbelt's natural heritage system?
- Does the proposed expansion build upon the Greenbelt's agricultural system?
- Does the proposed expansion build upon the Greenbelt's water resource system?

5. Complement Greater Golden Horseshoe Growth Plan

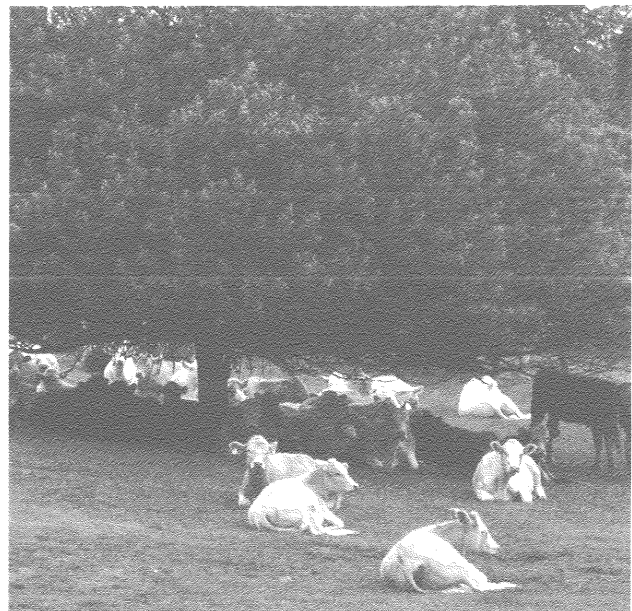
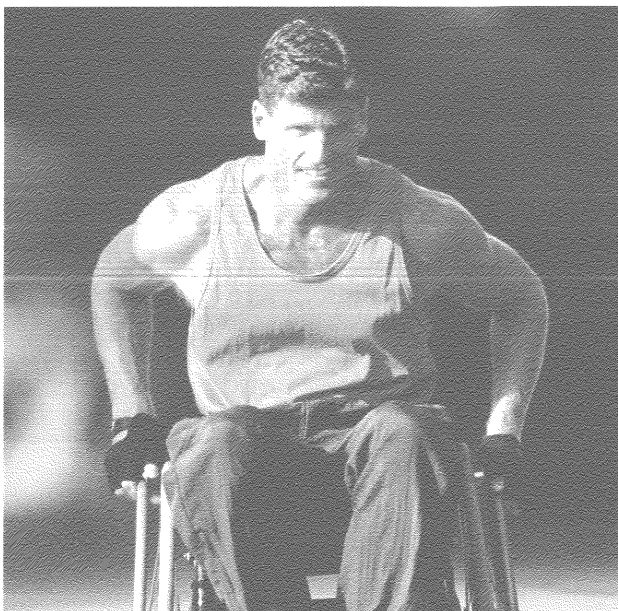
The Growth Plan sets a framework for managing growth and revitalizing existing urban communities in the Greater Golden Horseshoe. It also steers growth away from environmentally sensitive and prime agricultural areas. The Greenbelt Plan identifies where major urban growth cannot take place. To implement the Growth Plan's policies, municipalities are required to update their official plans by June 2009.

- Does the proposed expansion complement the Greater Golden Horseshoe Growth Plan?
- Will affected municipalities be able to bring their official plans into conformity with the Growth Plan if the proposed Greenbelt expansion occurs?

6. Timing and Relationship to Other Provincial Initiatives

There are a number of provincial initiatives affecting the Greater Golden Horseshoe including broader transportation/transit planning, protection of water resources and planning for future growth.

Does the request for growing the Greenbelt complement and support these ongoing provincial initiatives? (E.g. Does it allow for the completion of Source Protection Plans under the Clean Water Act, 2006?)



BUILDING THE GREENBELT BY LAYERS

The process of building the Greenbelt in 2004/05 involved extensive consultation and collaboration. It was led by the Greenbelt Task Force, an advisory group that conducted public meetings and reported back to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing in August 2004. The Greenbelt Plan was drafted based on the Task Force's recommendations and advice. For more information on those recommendations, please review the Task Force's report "Toward a Golden Horseshoe Greenbelt" at www.mah.gov.on.ca/GreenbeltTaskForce.

The provincial Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe was developed at the same time as the Greenbelt Plan in order to consider the amount of land required to meet the needs of growing communities.

The Greenbelt Plan

The Oak Ridges Moraine Plan and Niagara Escarpment Plan form the backbone of the Greenbelt. The Greenbelt's natural heritage system includes and builds on the natural heritage systems in the moraine and the escarpment.



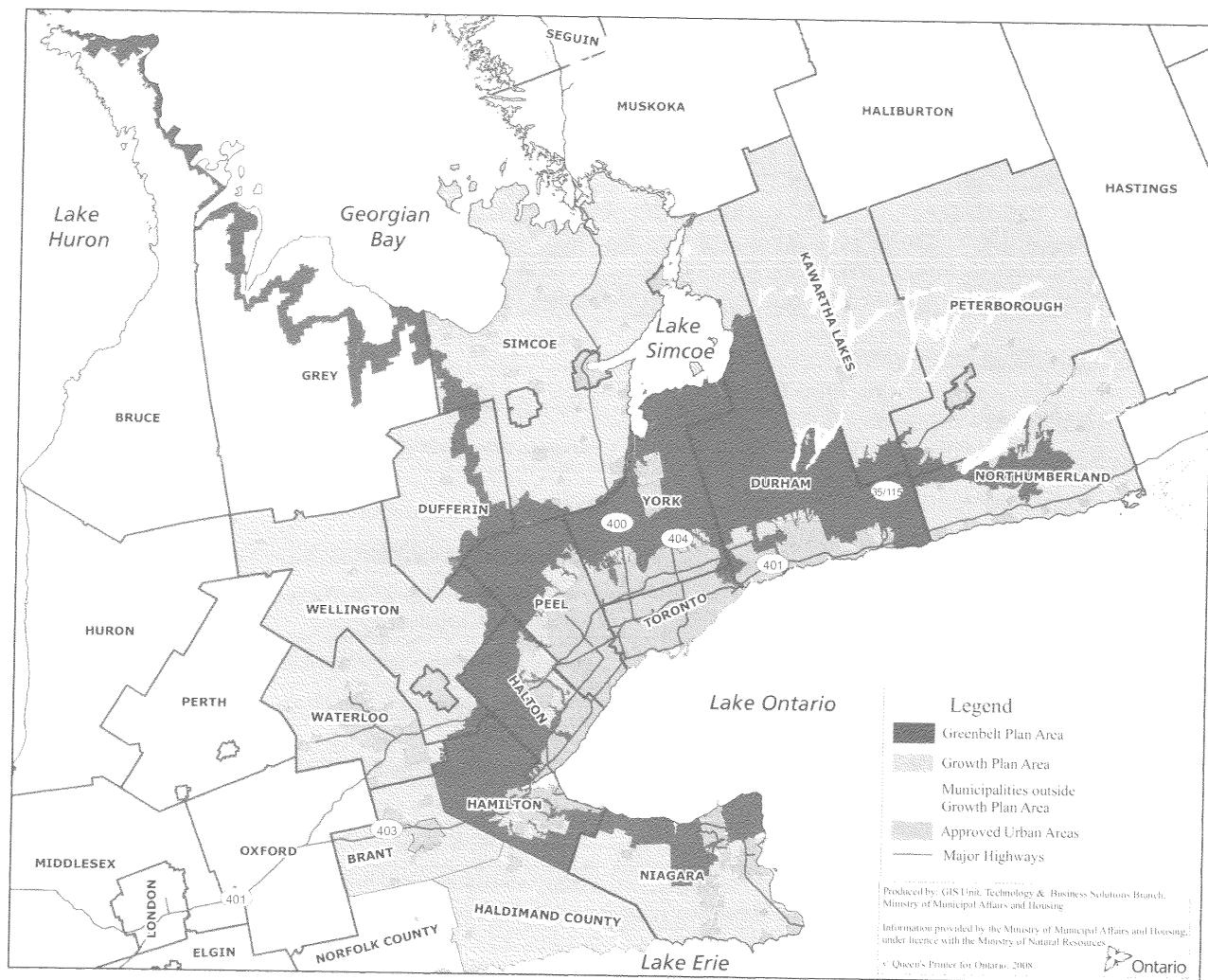
The final Greenbelt boundary was determined by identifying a natural heritage system and defining an agricultural system. The government also considered the amount of land required to accommodate anticipated growth. Together, these components form the Protected Countryside of the Greenbelt.

The natural heritage system identified major core areas containing high concentrations of natural features and linking areas that ecologically connect the core areas. Major valley corridors of rivers flowing from the Oak Ridges Moraine and the Niagara Escarpment also provide links from the Greenbelt to Lake Ontario.

The agricultural system was identified based on a number of factors including the Greenbelt Land Evaluation Area Review (LEAR) study, the existing pattern of agriculturally protected lands set out in municipal official plans and a consideration of projected future growth patterns. The LEAR method uses a scoring system and considers a number of potential factors such as soils, climate, productivity and land fragmentation. Studies were also done to identify two Specialty Crop Areas: the Niagara Peninsula tender fruit and grape area and the Holland Marsh.



Greater Golden Horseshoe



Comments and Feedback

We want to hear from you on the proposed criteria for considering Greenbelt expansions. Your input will help build a clear approach for considering expansions to the Greenbelt.

Send your comments to:

Growing the Greenbelt
Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing
14th floor, 777 Bay Street
Toronto, ON M5G 2E5

Phone: 416-585-6014

Fax: 416-585-4245

Email: greenbelt@ontario.ca

Comments must be received by April 30, 2008.

OTHER RESOURCES

For more information on the Greenbelt, how it was built and other supporting and complementary programs and initiatives, visit:

Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing
www.mah.gov.on.ca

Greenbelt

www.greenbelt.ontario.ca

Greenbelt Council

www.mah.gov.on.ca/greenbeltcouncil

Ministry of Natural Resources

www.mnr.gov.on.ca

Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal –
Places to Grow

www.placestogrow.ca

Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs

www.omafra.gov.on.ca

Ministry of the Environment

www.ene.gov.on.ca

Ministry of Tourism

www.tourism.gov.on.ca

Ministry of Culture

www.culture.gov.on.ca

Ministry of Transportation

www.mto.gov.on.ca

