



# THE LIVING GREENBELT:

Capturing the Full Value of this Legacy Landscape

Prepared by Urban Strategies Inc. and Leah Birnbaum, MCIP RPP



Possibility grows here.





## **THE LIVING GREENBELT: CAPTURING THE FULL VALUE OF THIS LEGACY LANDSCAPE**

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### **DISCLAIMERS**

The views and opinions expressed in this report are those of the authors only and do not necessarily represent the views of the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation, their Officers or Directors. We have done our best to confirm that all facts and figures are accurate. However, we do not retain liability for any errors or misrepresentations.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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In 2005, the Province created the Greenbelt, adding more than 1 million acres of farmland and environmentally sensitive lands to the already protected Niagara Escarpment and the Oak Ridges Moraine. Ontario's Greenbelt is the largest in the world and joins a global effort to preserve natural areas and agricultural lands from encroaching urban development. At the mid-point between the enactment of Ontario's Greenbelt Plan and its legislated ten-year review, this report assesses the progress of regional and area municipalities and the Province in implementing the objectives of the Greenbelt Plan. The intent of this research was to develop a better understanding of the initiatives that Greenbelt municipalities and provincial ministries have taken that go beyond protecting the land base and 'breathe life' into the Greenbelt Plan, and to consider ways of building on them.

This assessment used the five key objectives of the Greenbelt Plan as its basis: (i) sustain and nurture the agricultural sector; (ii) protect natural heritage systems; (iii) provide cultural, recreational and tourism opportunities; (iv) support viable rural communities; and, (v) ensure sustainable infrastructure and natural resource practices. Interviews were undertaken with eight provincial ministries and six upper tier Greenbelt municipalities.

From Niagara across to Durham, over 40 Greenbelt-related initiatives were identified by interviewees that are taking place at the regional level and that relate to supporting the broader Greenbelt vision. These range from stronger planning policies, capital projects such as trail development, economic initiatives such as support for on farm value added activities, data and information gathering, and stewardship, land acquisition and youth education programs. Many of these initiatives started from the ground up, by regional and/or local municipalities, the not-for-profit sector, or occasionally individuals. Although there are many initiatives underway, most initiatives are geared toward

agricultural viability and natural heritage protection. Fewer initiatives related to culture, recreation and tourism, promoting viable rural communities, and sustainable infrastructure in the Greenbelt were identified as currently underway. The following summary highlights the progress made and challenges identified related to achieving each Greenbelt objective:

## Support Agricultural Viability

The protection of the agricultural land base is one of the strongest tenets of the Plan and provides certainty for the agricultural sector to foster long-term investment in the land and helps to check further fragmentation of agricultural infrastructure. The economic viability of the agricultural businesses and markets is an issue that prevails across Canada and is by no means restricted to the Greenbelt area. However, in the Greenbelt, the local food movement and agri-tourism have seen tremendous uptake. Further, perceived limitations to value-added agriculture on prime agricultural lands have, in places, been overcome by innovation in regional land use policy. Durham and Niagara, in particular, have created a policy environment that allows for an array of value-added activities to supplement regular farm income.

## Protect the Natural Heritage

The regional municipalities have a number of strategies in place that protect the natural environment in the Greenbelt, most of which were in effect prior to the Greenbelt or else their development post-Greenbelt, has not been a direct response to the Greenbelt. However, the designation of Greenbelt lands has influenced where municipalities focus some of their environmental programs. For example, Greenlands securement in Peel and Durham Region focus on natural systems that are identified in the Greenbelt Plan.

### **Encourage Culture, Recreation and Tourism Opportunities**

Interviewees reported fewer initiatives to advance culture, recreation and tourism opportunities related to the Greenbelt. Although initiatives and policies that support culture, recreation and tourism are embedded within environmental stewardship, environmental preservation and agri-tourism strategies, these aspects of the programs are less likely to be tied or considered in conjunction with Greenbelt implementation. In Halton and Peel Regions, the area municipalities have jurisdiction over culture and economic development so efforts at the regional level tend to be minimal.

### **Provide for Viable Rural Communities**

Economic development and the provision of servicing infrastructure has become a concern in the settlement areas that are now located within the Greenbelt. Greenbelt policies restrict the outward growth of these towns and the extension of servicing infrastructure. Therefore, the challenge that settlement areas face is sustaining these communities economically, without relying on the traditional model of growth through outward development patterns. Although this is an issue that the regions are aware of, the development of alternative means to grow is largely being handled by the area municipalities and remains in early stages. Smaller communities in the Greenbelt like Acton and Georgetown are exploring water conservation options in an effort to support population growth without expanding infrastructure. Similarly the northern municipalities in Durham are using Integrated Community Sustainability Plans to explore economic growth options.

### **Encourage Sustainable Infrastructure and Natural Resources Practices**

Balancing the infrastructure and resource needs of a growing population, while minimizing the environmental impacts of these activities, is and will continue to be a challenge. At the regional level, some municipalities, such as Halton Region, are aiming to take a more hard-line stance on aggregate extraction to ensure that resource extraction minimizes the impacts on the environment. In Niagara Region, the municipality is seeking increased protection from resource extraction for the internationally significant Fonthill Kame feature, where aggregates continue to be extracted.

### Key Achievements to Date

In the short time that the Greenbelt Plan has been in place, municipalities have come a long way in ensuring conformity with the regulatory aspects of the Plan, and in advancing the broader objectives through over forty program, policy and capital initiatives. Although most of these initiatives were underway before the Plan was established, interviewees felt that they serve to strengthen the land base where these initiatives take place and help to “breathe life” into the Plan.

Overall, the research suggests that the Greenbelt...

- Establishes a permanently protected and iconic landscape
- Links ecological systems and supports regional natural heritage systems
- Facilitates enhanced trail connections across the Greenbelt
- Supports development of local food system
- Highlights critical issues facing near-urban agriculture
- Sets the stage for an emerging “greenbelt economy”
- Bridges perspectives and needs between urban and rural communities
- Fosters cross jurisdictional dialogue
- Leverages civil society partnerships

### Moving Forward

As a land base alone, the Greenbelt will not achieve its full potential. Even just five years into implementation, pressures to diminish and adjust discrete areas of the Greenbelt land base are beginning to become evident. The best strategy to capture the full value offered by the Greenbelt is to ensure that efforts to advance the Greenbelt objectives are addressing all facets of its potential. Based on the findings of this research and perspectives

offered by municipal and provincial staff, the following directions are recommended:

- **Build on inter-ministerial coordination and commitment** to achieve the multi-faceted nature of Greenbelt goals.
- **Increase collaboration across provincial and municipal levels** so that provincial and municipal staff are able to share and learn from the experiences of their colleagues.
- **Advance opportunities for innovation in the Greenbelt** by supporting pilot and demonstration projects that can help turn innovative ideas into best practices.
- **Reinforce the multiple Greenbelt objectives as a critical consideration** in making decisions around natural resource extraction and infrastructure development.
- **Embrace the ‘Big Picture’ of the Greenbelt** by finding synergies between the larger Greenbelt landscape and its municipal-scale attributes such as mapping Greenbelt-wide trail systems, markets and tourist attractions.

The introduction of the Greenbelt Plan and its counterpart, the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, signaled a significant provincial policy intervention to address post-war suburban patterns of auto-dominated, low density, outward growth. At the mid-point between its adoption and the legislated review it is clear that there are a number of challenges and opportunities that have yet to be addressed. This Living Greenbelt Report provides the basis for further dialogue and collaboration between Greenbelt municipalities.



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# 1 INTRODUCTION

# 1 INTRODUCTION

In 2005, the Province established the Greenbelt as a legacy for generations of Ontarians to come. Adding more than 1 million acres of farmland and environmentally sensitive lands to the already protected Niagara Escarpment Biosphere Reserve and the Oak Ridges Moraine, the 1.8 million acre Greenbelt is intended to support multiple objectives including: (i) sustaining and nurturing the agricultural sector; (ii) protecting natural heritage systems; (iii) providing cultural, recreational and tourism opportunities; (iv) supporting viable rural communities; and, (v) ensuring sustainable infrastructure and natural resource practices.

This report provides an overview of what is being done by the provincial and municipal governments to advance these objectives. It focuses on efforts that go above and beyond implementing the Plan's land use policies to achieve the Greenbelt's full potential. Section 1 elaborates on the background, purpose, and research method for this report. Section 2 provides the policy and regulatory context for the Greenbelt. Section 3 provides a synthesis of the key messages heard from interviewees at the provincial and municipal levels of government as well as civil society, including examples of initiatives that complement or reinforce the Plan. Section 4 offers suggestions for moving forward.

## **1.1 Background and Purpose**

The purpose of this research is to develop a better understanding of the initiatives that Greenbelt municipalities and provincial ministries have taken that go beyond protecting the land base and 'breathe life' into the Greenbelt Plan, and to consider ways of building on them. It focuses on public sector-led initiatives, and does not directly address the important roles being played by others in the civil society and the private sector.

We are at the mid-point between the enactment of Ontario's Greenbelt Plan and its legislated ten-year review. Municipalities are completing their official plan conformity exercises and the Province is in the process of reviewing and approving these new and amended plans. The focus of both levels of government in the past five years has necessarily been on regulating land use in and around the Greenbelt. Going forward there is an opportunity to learn from each other's innovations and challenges and build on the successes over the coming years to realize the full potential of the Greenbelt.

## 1.2 Research Method

Based on the objectives of the Greenbelt Act and Plan, the consultant team developed an assessment framework which guided semi-structured interviews with staff in eight provincial ministries and six upper-tier (or single-tier) municipalities to explore the initiatives and progress to date in implementing the Greenbelt Plan. Provincial interviews included staff from the Ministries of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Infrastructure (Ontario Growth Secretariat), Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, Natural Resources, Tourism and Culture, Health Promotion, Transportation and Environment, the regional municipalities of York, Peel, Halton, Niagara and Durham, and the City of Hamilton. At the provincial level, interviews were undertaken with staff involved with policy, planning and programs. In each municipality, the team met with staff from as wide a range of areas as possible in the timeframe, including those responsible for agriculture, planning, public works, tourism, economic development, natural heritage, parks and recreation, and community health. Greenbelt stakeholders such as conservation authorities and representatives of a small number of environmental and agricultural groups were also interviewed.

There were limitations to this research. Upper tier municipalities within the inner ring of the GGH were the focus of this work given limited time and resources and the desire to ensure the snapshot addressed a broad geographic scope. However, further review of Greenbelt implementation should include the local municipal perspective which is key for demonstrated “on-the-ground” application of Greenbelt policies. Given a defined project timeline, interviews were held with available representatives of municipal departments. In some cases, staff from seven departments were available; in others, as few as two. Interviewees were taken to be representative of their respective departments and

the municipality. Not all the projects noted in this report are municipally-led, but they are included if they have an impact on the wider community and advance Greenbelt Plan goals. A summary of the interviews can be found in Appendices A and B. For secondary sources, the team reviewed provincial and municipal documents.





## 2 SETTING THE CONTEXT

## 2 SETTING THE CONTEXT

Through the ages, designating land around urban areas for protection from development has been used to preserve natural areas and agricultural lands. Ontario's Greenbelt joins greenbelts in the United Kingdom, the Copenhagen Finger Plan, the Netherland's Green Heart, Melbourne's Green Wedges and others as a cross-jurisdictional large-scale landscape that offers a long-term legacy of preservation and more sustainable development patterns.

In Ontario, the introduction of the Greenbelt Plan and its counterpart, the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, signaled a significant provincial policy intervention to address post-war suburban patterns of auto-dominated, low density, outward growth. The Plans, taken together, are provincially directed efforts to strategically manage growth by encouraging intensification, compact communities and protection of the countryside. Both plans address the tremendous amount of population and economic growth that is expected to occur in the Greater Golden Horseshoe (GGH) over the next 20 years.

### **2.1 The Greenbelt Vision**

Ontario's Greenbelt conveys permanent protection over agricultural lands, rural settlements, and ecological systems within the designated Greenbelt land base. The Greenbelt Plan, which derives its authority from the 2005 Greenbelt Act, establishes planning policies for the protected countryside and provides direction on the implementation of these policies. The delineation of the Greenbelt makes it clear where development should not occur. The Act and Plan also establish a vision and a set of objectives that describe the broader intentions for the landscape. The vision and objectives are summarized as follows:

#### **1. Support Agricultural Viability**

The Plan's policies seek to provide certainty for the agricultural sector and support the economic viability of agriculture by designating specialty crop areas and prime agricultural lands and by encouraging associated infrastructure and value-added activities.

#### **2. Protect Natural Heritage Systems**

The Natural System of the Greenbelt includes the natural heritage system, the water resource system, key natural heritage features and key hydrologic features. The policies in the Plan focus on

protecting and restoring connections between the Oak Ridges Moraine, the Niagara Escarpment, Lake Ontario, Lake Simcoe and the major river valleys and maintaining connections with other broader systems. Policies also encourage the protection and enhancement of specific hydrological features, landforms, and habitats.

### **3. Encourage Culture, Recreation and Tourism Opportunities**

The Plan's policies support the conservation and promotion of cultural heritage resources, provide for a wide range of publicly accessible built and natural settings, and enable opportunities for sustainable tourism development.

### **4. Provide for Viable Rural Communities**

The Plan's policies focus on supporting a strong rural economy and sustaining the character of the countryside and rural communities.

### **5. Encourage Sustainable Infrastructure and Natural Resources Practices**

The Plan's policies seek to ensure the provision of infrastructure and resources to support a growing population while minimizing environmental impacts.

The land use policies of the Greenbelt Plan are primarily implemented through municipal official plans. Regional and area municipal official plans set policies for how land in the community will be used. In order to bring a municipal plan into conformity with the Greenbelt Plan, the municipal land use designations and associated policies must be consistent with the objectives and designations within the Greenbelt Plan. All of the regional and area municipalities are in the process of amending their official

plans to conform to the Greenbelt Plan and the Growth Plan. These efforts have required considerable resources over the past five years and, in many cases, have focused on aligning land use designations.

There is an important distinction between the Greenbelt Plan's land-use policies, which are clearly enforceable through municipal official plans (e.g. Settlement Areas outside the Greenbelt are not permitted to expand into the Greenbelt [Policy 3.4.2.3]), and its policies relating to the broader Greenbelt vision which are policies of encouragement and do not compel municipalities to act on their implementation (e.g. for all lands falling within the Protected Countryside, municipalities should provide for a full range of publicly accessible, built and natural settings for recreation including facilities, parklands, open space areas, trails and water-based activities [Policy 3.3.3.1]).

## **2.2 Players and Roles**

This section briefly outlines the roles of municipal and provincial governments play in implementing the objectives of the Greenbelt. While the public sector has been the focus of this research, it must be recognized that many civil society and private sector partners have been and will be key to achieving the Greenbelt goals.

### **Regional and Area Municipalities**

Municipalities are responsible for implementing the Greenbelt Plan's policies through their land use decisions and by amending their Official Plans to ensure that they are aligned with the Plan. They are also encouraged through the Plan to undertake activities supporting the broader objectives and in that regard, may develop and implement strategies for enhancing agricultural viability, natural heritage restoration, trails and other outdoor

recreation pursuits, and economic development. While the focus of this review has been on upper tier municipalities, area municipalities are also key given their detailed understanding of local challenges, opportunities and key stakeholders related to implementation of the Greenbelt.

### **The Province**

The provincial government is responsible for maintaining the integrity of the Greenbelt through monitoring of municipal implementation of the Plan's land use policies, and assessing the effectiveness of those policies in achieving the goals and objectives. The Province also has various grant and funding programs that could help achieve the broader objectives.

During the development of the Greenbelt Plan, representatives from many provincial ministries came together to craft its policies, a process which was led by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH). Once the Plan was in place, MMAH began to support the implementation of the Plan's policies by providing guidance to municipalities on their official plan amendments. This stage of implementation focused on securing the land base of the Greenbelt and ensuring land use policies were in conformity with the Plan. The Growing the Greenbelt initiative called upon MMAH staff to develop criteria for expanding the Greenbelt and MMAH drew on the resources of other ministries to contribute to the criteria. In addition, the Ministry is developing a framework for monitoring the effectiveness of the Greenbelt's policies, again through collaboration with other ministries. The province set up two bodies to oversee the Greenbelt: the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation and the Greenbelt Council.

## GREENBELT COUNCIL

The Greenbelt Council was set up as an advisory body to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to provide 'big picture' advice on the implementation of the Act and Plan. More specifically, the Council is responsible for providing advice with respect to monitoring the effectiveness of the Plan, proposed amendments to the Plan, and on the ten-year review of the Plan. The Council is made up of eleven appointees drawn from various sectors and across disciplines, including cross appointees to the Niagara Escarpment Commission, the Oak Ridges Moraine Foundation and the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation.

Since its inception, the Greenbelt Council has provided advice to the Minister on various topics ranging from land use and property tax treatment of on-farm value retention and value-added activities, to planning of transportation corridors through the Greenbelt, to the viability of agricultural industries. From time to time the Council also provides advice directly to other ministries, most notably with respect to agriculture policies and programs, and transportation planning affecting the Greenbelt.



# 3 WHAT WE LEARNED

## 3 WHAT WE LEARNED

Five years into Greenbelt implementation, there are many municipal initiatives underway that support achievement of the Greenbelt objectives and otherwise help to breathe life into the Plan. From Niagara across to Durham, over 40 Greenbelt-related initiatives were identified that are taking place at the regional level. These range from stronger planning policies, capital projects such as trail development, economic initiatives such as support for on farm, value-added activities, data and information gathering, stewardship, land acquisition and youth education programs. Many of these initiatives started from the ground up, by regional and/or local municipalities, the not-for-profit sector, or occasionally by individuals. Provincial ministries generally do not see it as their role to be the instigator of these projects or initiatives.

This section provides a synthesis of what we heard from the interviews and through the review of materials provided by the regional municipal and provincial staff. First, there is a detailed review of what has been achieved in relation to each of the five Greenbelt objectives. Second, there is a summary of common messages and observations that capture the progress made to date in realizing the Greenbelt vision. Detailed summaries of municipal and provincial interviews are included in Appendices A and B.

### **3.1 Achieving Greenbelt Objectives**

The following summaries are organized according to the five categories of Greenbelt Plan objectives outlined in Section 2. For each category of objectives, there is an overview, more specific examples of areas of progress that are contributing to that particular objective, and challenges or gaps that remain to be addressed. The initiatives underway in these regional municipalities are, for the most part, not attributed to the creation or implementation of the Greenbelt Plan as many were well underway before 2005. They do, however, support or reinforce the Greenbelt land base and implementation of the objectives.

#### **3.1.1 Support Agricultural Viability**

The Greenbelt Plan's goal is to contribute to the economic viability of farming communities and to support agricultural land as a continuing commercial source of food and employment.

##### **Overview**

The protection of the agricultural land base is one of the strongest tenets of the Plan. It provides certainty for the agricultural sector to foster long term investment in the land and helps check further fragmentation of agricultural infrastructure.

Securing the land base is well understood by all stakeholders to be only the first of many steps needed to ensure viable agriculture in the Greenbelt. The economic viability of agricultural businesses and markets, an issue that prevails across Canada, is a significant challenge. In the Greenbelt, however, the local food movement and agri-tourism have seen tremendous uptake. Further, the current policy limitations to value-added agriculture on prime agricultural lands have, in places, been countered by innovation in regional land use policy. Durham and Niagara, in particular, have created a policy environment that allows for an array of value-added processes to occur on farm.

The Province's role in protecting and supporting agricultural uses in the Greenbelt has been to define and protect the land base and to provide some marketing and business support to farmers. The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing is primarily responsible for creating and regulating the land use policies that reserve agricultural land for agricultural uses while the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) is responsible for supporting the viability of Ontario's farmers and farmland.

### Areas of Progress

**Agriculture is increasingly being reconstituted as part of the regional culture.**

Efforts at the municipal level to prioritize agriculture are legitimized by the existence of the Greenbelt Plan and the requirement to interpret and comply with its policies. In all municipalities preserving agricultural lands and industries is now a major consideration in deciding where and how to grow. The Region of Niagara has historically placed a priority on supporting its agricultural economy and this is demonstrated by the level of influence of its two agricultural committees and complementary staff resources. Halton is re-structuring its planning department to place a higher priority on agricultural and rural issues.

**Regional committees create a forum to advocate agricultural perspectives.**

Each regional municipality has an agricultural advisory committee or task force, appointed by Council, to ensure that the agricultural and rural perspective is considered in regional decision making. The role of these committees varies depending on the priority placed on agriculture in the region. In Niagara, the committee plays a very active role in spearheading new studies and influencing policies whereas in other regions such as York, the committee is less active and engaged. In Durham and the City of Hamilton, a specific agricultural liaison staff member is dedicated to working with the committees, planning staff and the agricultural community. Although this has not been implemented in all municipalities, there is a general recognition that this kind of staff role is very useful in building trust with farmers, ensuring that their concerns are heard and seeking ways to address concerns related to agricultural viability and the urban-rural interface.

The Greater Toronto Area Agricultural Action Committee (GTA AAC) operates as a coordinating body of agricultural initiatives across the GTA and is well known by staff at the municipalities and the province. There is considerable optimism that it will be able to provide a forum for cross-jurisdictional discussions around best practices and spearhead improvements in policies at the municipal level.

**Significant agricultural areas have become distinguished by their innovation, progressive policies and market growth.**

Niagara, Durham and the Holland Marsh area growers continue to build on their strong histories and distinguishing features to advance the protection, viability and marketability of their agricultural industries. Niagara has seen significant growth in the wine industry: an increase from six to 59 commercial wineries and 50 per cent increase in the number of hectares in vines since

2001. The Vineland Research and Innovation Centre has been reconfigured and has grown as a centre of excellence drawing resources from the federal government and the University of Guelph. The Holland Marsh Growers Association has actively redirected a portion of its market share to delivering local food to the Greater Golden Horseshoe market. In Durham, the Region is working with Algoma Orchards to increase the number of apple varieties and to increase production facilities for juicing to supply major grocery chains such as Loblaws with local product.

**The understanding of the economic value of agriculture is growing.**

Within the Greenbelt area, municipalities have gained a better understanding of the economic value of agriculture for their communities. Several economic impact studies have been undertaken for the regions of Niagara, Durham, Halton and York and for the Holland Marsh. An opportunity remains to integrate the findings of existing studies and undertake new ones to create a Greenbelt-wide picture of how the landscape lends itself to ongoing agricultural economic viability. The Agriculture and Agri-Food Strategy and Action Plan for the Golden Horseshoe, being led by the GTA AAC with Niagara Region and the City of Hamilton should make a significant contribution in this regard.

**Innovation through value-added agricultural policies.**

Value-added activities on farmland have been positioned by farmers and by municipalities as an important means of supporting the economic viability of the industry. However, commercialization of farmland in the form of farm-gate sales, bed and breakfasts and farm tours is not consistently permitted in land use policies. Regions like Niagara have been proactive in creating policies that support value-added activities. The Niagara Region will also be submitting value-added policy

recommendations to the province as part of the review of the Provincial Policy Statement.

**Challenges**

**There is limited provincial programming to address near-urban agricultural issues.**

There are no provincial programs designed specifically to support Greenbelt or near-urban farming businesses. OMAFRA is reluctant to **create** programs specific to farmland within the Greenbelt and stresses that its programs to support agricultural businesses (including cost-sharing, training, research and commercialization programs) are made available throughout the province. Marketing support for Ontario products, the Pick Ontario Freshness program, is also province-wide with no Greenbelt-specific elements.

**Planning for infrastructure to support agriculture remains a challenge.**

Regional municipalities are struggling with how to provide appropriate infrastructure to support local agriculture. Some are contemplating land use policies that would set out appropriate locations for food processing, inspection or distribution facilities close to agricultural areas while ensuring that these land uses are compatible with surrounding areas. In the interviews, the degree to which these facilities are permitted under the Greenbelt Plan was identified as an area where clarity through interpretation would be helpful. Additionally, as the population of the GGH continues to grow, there is a concern that transportation options for movement of agricultural products to markets and movement of materials such as seed, fertilizer and farming equipment will be constrained.

**Better communication between municipalities, farmers, the province, and residents is required.**

The need for improved understanding between Greenbelt stakeholders was noted by almost all municipalities interviewed. Farmers need to better understand the policies that regulate practices on their land along with available funding programs for marketing and environmental stewardship. Urban populations need to better understand and accept the mechanics of local food production in order to support the local food market which is already on the rise. In areas where the urban and rural landscapes meet, residents need a better understanding of farming practices so they can accept the occasional nuisances of odour, dust and tractors on the roads. All stakeholders need to understand the benefits and actual policies of the Greenbelt Plan in order to disentangle the Greenbelt from broader economic issues facing farming.

**Protecting agricultural land from conversion does not mean agricultural land will permanently stay in production.**

Both municipal and provincial staff noted the need for additional policies or initiatives to keep protected agricultural land in production. While land is protected from being re-zoned for other uses, it is perceived that there are insufficient incentives to keep agricultural land from lying unplanted. The trend of urbanites buying properties on agricultural land for estate housing is a growing concern in Halton Region, for example, and is identified as a trend by staff at OMAFRA.

### 3.1.2 Protect Natural Heritage

The Greenbelt Plan's goal is to restore and improve the Greenbelt's ecological and hydrologic functions.

#### Overview

The protection and conservation of natural heritage is perhaps the most advanced objective of the Greenbelt Plan. The Plan represents a shift, one which reflects contemporary natural heritage approaches, from the protection of isolated natural features to the protection and enhancement of natural systems. The Plan builds on a long history of environmental protection in all Greenbelt communities and on the policy momentum for conserving major environmental features such as the Niagara Escarpment and Oak Ridges Moraine. By providing permanent protection to a greenbelt-wide natural system, the Plan provides municipalities with added certainty for their efforts to conserve environmental systems and functions.

The regional municipalities have a number of strategies in place that protect the natural environment in the Greenbelt, but most of these strategies were in effect before the Greenbelt. The designation of Greenbelt lands has, however, influenced where municipalities choose to augment or focus their programs. For example, Greenlands securement initiatives in Peel Region will focus on natural systems that are also identified in the Greenbelt Plan.

The Province's role in implementing the environmental protection policies of the Greenbelt Plan has been to work to define the natural heritage and water resource system, and to regulate the uses that are permitted within these systems. The Plan requires that municipalities map their key natural heritage and key hydrologic features and apply the Plan's policies to those

areas through their official plans. The Province provides mapping resources and guidance to this end through the Ministry of Natural Resources and the Ministry of the Environment.

### Areas of Progress

#### Regional greenlands securement programs reinforce Greenbelt protection

Most Greenbelt municipalities have greenlands securement strategies in place which overlap significantly with the Greenbelt. Greenlands securement programs in all municipalities involve collaboration between parties such as the Conservation Authority, land trusts and regional municipalities, and involve significant financial commitment for land acquisition. Regional forests also tend to coincide within the Greenbelt's natural heritage system area although they predate the Plan itself. The Greenbelt adds a layer of protection to these municipal initiatives. While greenlands securement programs have resulted, to date, in only a handful of new properties within the Greenbelt coming into public ownership, the model is an important one of collaboration between parties for public land acquisition and stewardship of strategic parcels.

#### Environmental stewardship programs are gaining traction.

There are initiatives underway that reinforce environmental stewardship on farmland. The nation-wide Environmental Farm Plan program, administered by the Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association, has been taken up to varying degrees across the Greenbelt municipalities. Peel has been experimenting with the Rural Water Quality Program that provides politicians, regional staff, media and agricultural workers an opportunity to tour farms and learn best practices in source water protection.

#### Technical guidance and mapping resources are being made available.

The Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) and the Ministry of the Environment (MOE) provide municipalities with support in defining and mapping natural systems. MNR is finalizing a series of technical papers designed to assist with interpretation and implementation of the natural heritage policies of the Greenbelt Plan. MNR creates and updates GIS mapping of natural features on an ongoing basis and makes these available for municipalities to use through Land Information Ontario Geospatial Data Exchange. The Ministry is also coordinating the mapping of Ontario's trails, with support from the Ministry of Health Promotion.

#### Early interest in growing the Greenbelt focuses on adding lands for environmental protection.

Following the Province's release of the criteria for expanding the boundaries of the Greenbelt, most of the early interest is motivated by a desire to add environmental protection to landscapes and build awareness among urban populations of the importance and proximity of the Greenbelt. To date four municipalities have passed official council motions to grow the Greenbelt. The Town of Oakville is expanding the Greenbelt to include the Glenorchy Reserve lands that would extend the Greenbelt along 16 Mile Creek to the lakefront. In Toronto, a motion has been passed to extend the Greenbelt along the Don and Humber river valleys. The City of Mississauga has passed a council motion to bring the Greenbelt into the city along the Credit River, and most recently the City of Guelph has passed a motion to expand the Greenbelt along the Speed and Eramosa rivers. In all cases the rationale for growing the Greenbelt is to reinforce existing policies (in local official plans and conservation authority regulations) on natural features protection and build greater connections between the Greenbelt and Ontario's urban centres.

## Challenges

### Greenbelt designations don't always follow the municipally mapped natural heritage system.

A common challenge facing municipalities is a lack of consistency between regional natural heritage system mapping and the natural system identified in the Greenbelt Plan. Municipalities such as Hamilton and Halton Region believe that their natural heritage system mapping is more accurate than that provided in the Greenbelt Plan. In the case of such discrepancies, a protocol for reviewing and reconciling these differences or allowance for flexibility in application of policies does not exist and could help to reconcile differences.

### Layers of regulation can be difficult to coordinate.

All of the environmental protection legislation can be difficult to harmonize at the municipal level. Many municipal staff need to ensure compliance with two or more sets of regulation such as the Oak Ridges Moraine Plan, the Niagara Escarpment Plan, the Greenbelt Plan, and the Lake Simcoe Protection Plan. The general consensus from municipalities was that there are enough policies and regulations in place to encourage environmental protection and that efforts should now focus on coordinating and implementing existing policies and regulations. These policies and regulations should be reinforced through continued funding and refinement in scope of existing programs, not the creation of new ones.

### Efforts to date focus on protection, not enhancement.

The Greenbelt Plan's goals for environmental protection call for the protection, maintenance and enhancement of natural systems. Municipal and provincial progress in furthering these goals thus far has been focused on protecting lands from incompatible uses or development. Beyond the work of

Conservation Authorities, there are few strategies, tools or resources in place to pro-actively enhance or restore parts of the natural heritage system. Over time a balance in efforts and resources between protection and enhancement will be important for long term stewardship.

### 3.1.3 Encourage Culture, Recreation and Tourism Opportunities

The Greenbelt Plan's goal is to provide opportunities for a wide range of open space and recreation, sustainable tourism development and the conservation and promotion of cultural heritage resources.

#### Overview

To date, few initiatives have been undertaken to advance culture, recreation and tourism opportunities specifically related to the Greenbelt. Although initiatives and policies that support culture, recreation and tourism are embedded within environmental stewardship, environmental preservation and agri-tourism strategies, these aspects of the programs are less likely to be tied or considered in conjunction with Greenbelt implementation. In Halton and Peel Regions it is the lower-tier governments that have jurisdiction over culture and economic development so efforts at the regional level tend to be minimal.

The Province supports the culture, recreation and tourism goals of the Greenbelt Plan by providing grants for the development of tourism resources, by mapping trails, and by supporting projects that contribute to healthier communities. While these funds are not designed to further Greenbelt Plan objectives specifically, they may be used to assess and improve the tourism and recreation potential of Greenbelt communities.

## Areas of Progress

### Trails strategies are in place.

Each region has a trails strategy, including networks within the Greenbelt, that is reflected in their Official Plans. Trails are often implemented and managed by conservation authorities or lower-tier municipalities. These strategies link existing trails and create municipal and inter-regional linkages, often through the reuse of existing infrastructure like decommissioned rail lines.

### Trail systems are becoming integrated with other tourism and recreation activities.

Trails can link towns, urban centres, and other destination points such as the waterfront. Some regions, such as Niagara, are beginning to incorporate these trails into larger tourism strategies. The Niagara Greenbelt Discovery Tours website offers visitors an overview of sites, accommodation, restaurants and vineyards along particular trails as part of a sustainable vacation package. Similarly, the Nokiida Trail connects the Greenbelt towns of Aurora, Newmarket and East Gwillimbury in York Region, linking urban areas with cultural and recreation sites.

### Provincial funding supports development of tourism resources.

The Ministry of Tourism and Culture manages two funds – the Tourism Development Fund and the Celebrate Ontario Fund – which may be accessed by organizations seeking to promote tourism within the Greenbelt. It also offers an assessment and evaluation tool to analyze a region's tourism amenities and attractions and identify opportunities for tourism investment and development.

### The Province is mapping Ontario's trails.

The Ministry of Health Promotion (MHP) developed a long-term Ontario Trails Strategy in 2005. As part of its implementation, it funds the Ministry of Natural Resources to collect mapping information from various sources including municipalities, conservation authorities and outdoor recreation groups. These are consolidated and standardized and made available to the public through a searchable online map.

### Project funding is available to support healthy communities

MHP also manages a cost-sharing program which provides financial support for projects that contribute to the health and wellness of communities. Several organizations within the Greenbelt have accessed this funding, including the Town of Aurora which received funding to create its Trails Master Plan.

## Challenges

### Greenbelt-wide coordination of tourism and recreation resources is lacking.

There is no Greenbelt-wide promotion of trails and recreation, but rather pockets of initiatives. There is potential in this area for a Greenbelt-wide inventory and economic assessment of culture and recreation resources including bed and breakfasts, cross-country and other trails and restaurants. The Province responds to grant proposals and has undertaken some branding initiatives, but does not pro-actively promote the Greenbelt as a tourism destination or campaign.

### Accommodating recreational landscapes with working farms requires a managed approach.

Recreational uses on or near farms can lead to conflict. Some farmers are concerned that recreational uses such as trails are incompatible with the function of working landscapes in terms

of odour, crop contamination and disturbing livestock, etc. Land owners are also concerned about liability should an injury occur on private property. Accommodating both recreational and agricultural uses requires efforts to increase awareness and to pro-actively manage and direct activities to areas that can best accommodate them – much like the management of trails and active recreation into sensitive environmental areas.

#### 3.1.4 Provide for Viable Rural Communities

The Greenbelt Plan’s goal is to support a strong rural economy and sustain the character of the countryside and its rural communities.

##### Overview

Municipalities are challenged by how to provide servicing and support the economic viability of settlement areas that are now located within the Greenbelt. Typically, economic growth is equated with population growth which creates greater demands on servicing infrastructure and relies on outward greenfield development. Greenbelt policies restrict the outward growth of these towns and the extension of servicing infrastructure. Therefore, settlement areas face the challenge of how to sustain their economies without relying on the traditional models of economic growth. Although the regions are aware of this issue, the development of alternative means to grow is largely being handled by the lower-tier municipalities and remains in early stages.

The Province provides funding to rural communities through programs like the Rural Economic Development Fund, the Environmental Farm Plan program and the Ontario Market Investment Fund that are designed to support economic diversification and update infrastructure. These programs are not tailored to communities within Greenbelt but are available to rural communities throughout the province.

##### Areas of Progress

###### Small towns are exploring alternatives to traditional economic growth models.

In the north of Durham, lower-tier municipalities are exploring alternatives to the traditional model of outward growth by collaborating on the preparation of an Integrated Sustainable Community Plan, in part to allow them to access funding through the federal gas tax but also to collectively explore new drivers and models for sustainable growth. Their goals are to promote the conservation of resources and link the economies of these areas with surrounding agriculture, green energy and tourism.

###### Greenbelt communities are exploring strategies to minimize servicing needs.

Development approaches such as Low Impact Development (LID) and conservation strategies, in particular for water and energy, are being explored in many greenbelt municipalities to overcome servicing constraints and challenges. For example, the Towns of Acton and Georgetown in Halton Region rely on ground water for their water supply. Both towns are exploring conservation programs such as incentives to install low-flush toilets, retrofitting all dependent water users and rebate programs to conserve water.

###### Economic diversification and infrastructure funding is available from the Province.

To support rural settlement areas, the Province offers funding programs through OMAFRA’s Rural Affairs Branch. The Rural Economic Development (RED) Program helps communities find ways to diversify their economies. The priorities of the RED program are supporting the food processing sector, community revitalization and skills training. Successful projects have included the creation of an arts heritage destination at Alton

Mill, and several downtown façade improvement revitalization projects. The Canada-Ontario Municipal Rural Infrastructure Fund (COMRIF) funds improvements to rural municipalities' water systems, sewage systems, roads and bridges. These funds are not Greenbelt-specific and are available for projects throughout Ontario.

## Challenges

### New approaches to growing rural economies are needed.

The 'greenbelting' of settlement areas restricts boundary expansions and services. The viability of these settlement areas is a challenge, but also represents an opportunity to reposition the economic base of these communities from traditional urban growth models to environmentally focused models which value the ecological and physical landscape of the Greenbelt. The research and analysis being undertaken for the Greater Toronto Countryside Mayors' Alliance will begin to create a better understanding of the social, economic and financial trends facing rural communities today, and should provide a departure point for further discussion and exploration of these issues.

### Innovative tools, incentives and mechanisms tailored to Greenbelt communities are needed.

Other than the above noted analysis for the 14 member municipalities of the Alliance, there is no Greenbelt-wide exploration of these issues. The exploration of tools, mechanism and incentives such as county-wide Community Improvement Districts, cultural heritage landscape tax credits or rural community green funds to support viability of the greenbelted rural settlement is a notable gap.

## 3.1.5 Encourage Sustainable Infrastructure and Natural Resources Practices

The Greenbelt Plan's goal is to ensure that the development of infrastructure proceeds in an environmentally sensitive manner and that natural resources are used responsibly.

### Overview

It is an ongoing challenge to accommodate the infrastructure and resource needs of a growing population while minimizing the environmental impacts of these activities. Some regional municipalities, such as Halton, are aiming to take a more hard-line stance on aggregate extraction to ensure that resource extraction minimizes the impacts on the environment. In Niagara Region, the municipality is seeking increased protection from resource extraction for the internationally significant Fonthill Kame feature, where aggregates continue to be extracted.

When planning highways, the Ministry of Transportation takes the Greenbelt into account by consulting with and seeking advice from the Greenbelt Council as it undertakes environmental assessments for future highway corridors. Further, the Ministry of Infrastructure aims to align its infrastructure funding with provincial growth management policies by directing infrastructure investment to built-up areas where the majority of future growth is to be accommodated.

### Areas of Progress

#### The Greenbelt Plan does not allow new aggregate operations in significant wetlands and woodlands, and habitat of endangered and threatened species.

It also does not allow for new aggregate operations in the Niagara Peninsula Tender Fruit and Grape area between Lake Ontario and the Niagara Escarpment Plan area. New operations may, however, be permitted in other key natural heritage features and

key hydrologic features under certain conditions. The Plan also provides for more specific rehabilitation requirements than the Provincial Policy Statement.

#### **Municipalities are starting to monitor aggregate extraction.**

Municipalities realize that aggregate extraction is a necessary part of supporting development, however, they report that the methods of extraction, location and remediation practices have not been monitored appropriately. Halton Region has worked to improve the monitoring of aggregate extraction, and the Town of Welland in Niagara Region has imposed restrictions on aggregate extraction in sensitive areas.

#### **Infrastructure funding and growth management policies are being aligned.**

The Province's approach to infrastructure provision is to align infrastructure funding to support growth where it ought to occur. Under the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, investment for infrastructure and transit is targeted to urban growth centres and other areas where intensification is planned. This should serve to protect Greenbelt areas from sprawl that would otherwise flow along extensions of infrastructure.

#### **Plans are in place to move more people by transit.**

Metrolinx's Regional Transportation Plan will improve walking and cycling access to GO stations and build new rapid transit lines throughout the urbanized area south of the Greenbelt. Planning for regionally connected and efficient transit infrastructure supports the goals of the Greenbelt Plan by reducing the pressure for highway expansion into Greenbelt lands.

#### **Planners are working with affected communities on infrastructure planning.**

The location and design of highway infrastructure has the potential to impact a number of activities in the Greenbelt. In Durham Region, the extension of Highway 407 will carve up parcels of farmland. To mitigate additional impacts, the Ministry of Transportation consulted with the Durham Agricultural Advisory Committee on an appropriate design for the highway so that it is able to accommodate farming equipment.

#### **Challenges**

##### **Permissions and restrictions around resource extraction need more clarity.**

Municipalities expressed uncertainty about the Greenbelt Plan's policies on aggregates and how these relate to local policies permitting or restricting resource extraction. The interaction between the Greenbelt Plan's natural heritage protection policies and resource extraction permissions are seen as being difficult to interpret. Municipal stakeholder and community outreach or education on this issue is needed to provide clear direction on how the policies work together.

##### **Long-term monitoring and accountability for resource extraction is weak.**

Although policies governing the location, methods and clean-up of resource extraction is set out in various pieces of legislation (the Provincial Policy Statement, the Aggregate Resources Act, the Greenbelt Plan), long-term monitoring of these sites and enforcement of remediation efforts has fallen short. Better coordination and monitoring of remediation is needed to ensure effective strategies and enforcement to minimize negative impacts of resource extraction.

### Perceived conflict between the intent of the Greenbelt and major infrastructure projects.

The Greenbelt Plan anticipates and provides direction on the introduction of new and/or expanded infrastructure facilities to serve the substantial growth projected for southern Ontario and identified in the Growth Plan. The extensions to 407 corridors and the proposed economic corridor are key examples. There is a sense, however, that the Greenbelt objectives could be overridden by the planning, design and construction processes for major infrastructure and transportation corridors which traverse the Greenbelt. While the Greenbelt Council provides input into current provincial infrastructure projects, this process is not well known. Greater clarity, transparency and commitment to the manner in which Greenbelt objectives are considered in major infrastructure projects is required to address this real or perceived conflict.

## 3.2 Broader Messages

In addition to the information about achieving specific Greenbelt goals, a number of broad messages and observations emerged from the interviews:

### 1. We need the Greenbelt to stop sprawl

The Greenbelt is a critical provincially directed backstop to curb sprawling communities and the associated loss of agricultural lands and degradation of our natural environment. The greatest success to date has been protecting the land base against further sprawl. As a key complement to its cousin, the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, the concept of the Greenbelt is well accepted by all the regional municipalities interviewed as an important legacy initiative. By defining a green line, there has been a clear delineation of where development should occur and where it should not.

### 2. The Greenbelt has different meanings and values to its constituents

There are many stakeholders invested in the Greenbelt, sometimes with apparently competing interests. Examples cited by interview participants include differences between rural and urban populations, or between environmentalists and farmers versus aggregate companies. Balancing these interests and finding direction in the Greenbelt Plan in terms of what should be prioritized can be a challenge.

### 3. Greater Greenbelt-wide coordination is needed

There is a need for greater coordination of efforts across the Greenbelt so that communities have opportunities to learn more from one another. Regional municipalities tend to work only within their own boundaries. Provincial ministries have scoped roles and inter-ministerial collaboration has been limited to a land use

focus. Greenbelt-wide coordination of non-land-use initiatives is lacking. The Greater Toronto Area Agricultural Action Committee and Greater Toronto Countryside Mayors' Alliance are examples of coordinating bodies that provide a forum for Greenbelt communities. More coordination of this sort is needed to achieve Greenbelt objectives related to viability of agriculture and rural settlements, tourism and recreation.

#### **4. The Greenbelt is not yet a driving entity in and of itself**

The regional and provincial initiatives complement and support the Greenbelt's goals but have not been undertaken as a result of the Plan. There is not a strong understanding of the Greenbelt as a distinct entity and its landscape-scale potential. Some interviewees also expressed concern that the Greenbelt is not given adequate consideration when major infrastructure projects which impact its land base are planned and designed.

#### **5. The Greenbelt's full potential hasn't yet been tapped**

It will be critical to move from viewing the Greenbelt as a secured land base to viewing its whole value potential as an economic, environmental and community health asset. Municipal and provincial staff are confident in the legislative basis of the Greenbelt's legacy. There was little concern that the Act or Plan would be significantly altered following a change in government. To date, agriculture and natural heritage- related objectives have the most traction and have been the focus of many initiatives. There has been less progress, however, toward achieving objectives on rural economic development, trails, recreation and cultural resources, and infrastructure development. Many respondents noted that advancing progress on the broader objectives would be important to fulfill the full potential of the Greenbelt legacy.

#### **6. Tools and resources are needed to move forward**

The Greenbelt Plan provides a policy base and a geographic definition but complementary economic strategies, tools and incentives are needed. Many tools, resources and programs already exist that could be applied in Greenbelt communities but more awareness through better promotion and greater flexibility in the application of the existing tools and incentives are needed. Further, greater clarity on where or who to go to in order to access Greenbelt- eligible or Greenbelt-related funding would be helpful to many municipalities. Finally, mechanisms such as region-wide Community Improvement Districts, cultural heritage landscape tax credits, ecological goods and services, or rural community green funds to support viability of the greenbelted rural settlements are possible innovations that could further enhance the existing toolbox.





# 4 WHAT HAS AND CAN BE ACHIEVED

## 4 WHAT HAS AND CAN BE ACHIEVED

In the short time that the Greenbelt Plan has been in place, municipalities and their communities have come a long way in ensuring conformity with the regulatory aspects of the Plan and advancing the broader objectives through over forty program, policy and capital initiatives. Although most of these initiatives were underway before the Plan was established, the Plan serves to strengthen the land base where these initiatives take place and, in turn, these initiatives provide a solid platform for moving forward with broader Greenbelt goals. Provincial ministries have worked collaboratively with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing to support municipal compliance, develop a process and criteria for adding lands to the Greenbelt as well as to develop a framework for measuring effectiveness of the Plan's policies.

### 4.1 A Synthesis of Achievements to Date

The following is a synthesis of key achievements from the more tangible – protection and support of land uses, to the less tangible – an emerging Greenbelt economy and relationship building. This reflects the position of the Greenbelt after five years: the land base has a strong boundary that is entrenched in local land-use policies and now the task will be to 'breathe life' into the non-land use directions of the Plan.

#### The Greenbelt...

##### **1. Establishes a permanently protected and iconic landscape**

The Greenbelt establishes a designated land base that protects 1.8 million acres of agricultural and natural heritage areas from future urban development. The certainty that land uses will not change allows land owners, the public sector, and not-for-profit organizations to invest and plan for the future. The Greenbelt also creates a symbolic landscape for southern Ontario that demonstrates a commitment to and awareness of our dependence on a healthy and sustainable Greenbelt-wide landscape and set of communities.

##### **2. Links ecological systems and supports regional natural heritage systems**

Spanning from Niagara to Northumberland, the Greenbelt connects regional ecological systems and provides a permanent provincially-protected layer on top of local policy protection to encourage enhancement and restoration of these areas. Major ecological features such as the Oak Ridges Moraine and the Niagara Escarpment are linked to smaller scale systems like the Cootes to Escarpment. Other significant features such as the Fonthill Kame and the Ganaraska Forest enjoy protection within the Greenbelt landscape.

### **3. Facilitates enhanced trail connections across the Greenbelt**

Regional trail networks have been established to varying degrees. In some areas trails are spearheaded by the local municipalities and in other areas the region plays a larger role. The province (Metrolinx, Ministries of Health and Municipal Affairs) is demonstrating an increased policy interest in active transportation so there is potential for the Greenbelt to provide the landscape scale base and branding for inter-regional trail connections.

### **4. Supports development of local food system**

With the growing popularity of local food and urban farmers markets, the Greenbelt provides a strong branding opportunity for local food. At the regional and lower-tier levels this has been encouraged through policies that allow for farm-gate sales and agri-tourism and by supporting farmers' markets in urban areas. Five municipalities (Durham, York, Niagara, Hamilton and Halton) are in various stages of developing food charters, food action plans and/or food policy councils, reflecting the growing importance of food access and local food systems in regional policy.

### **5. Highlights critical issues facing near-urban agriculture**

The Greenbelt has created a forum to discuss some of the big issues facing the long-term economic viability of near-urban agriculture. Determining appropriate locations for supportive infrastructure, strengthening local markets, and creating policies that allow for value-added services without compromising the agricultural function of farmlands are common issues across the Greenbelt. The Greater Toronto Area Agricultural Action Committee and regional agricultural committees have the potential to coordinate ongoing discussions and actions to address these issues.

### **6. Sets the stage for an emerging “greenbelt economy”**

The northern rural communities in Durham are currently working together to reposition their economic growth around sustainability and the greenbelt economy. The agri-eco-tourism economy growing in and around Jordan in Niagara demonstrates another integrated growth model complementary to the Greenbelt. The many initiatives underway within the Greenbelt could support the emerging concept of a greenbelt economy; recognizing that the paradigm for economic development is shifting. The experience of municipal partnerships elsewhere in the province may offer lessons for creating economic synergies on a regional scale that spur innovation and linkages across clusters of businesses that could be applied in the Greenbelt.

### **7. Bridges perspectives and needs between urban and rural communities**

The Greenbelt has sparked conversation and debate about who benefits from this landscape and its associated policies. This is an important discussion as it raises issues about the needs of rural and urban communities and what they have to offer one another. Urban areas provide a market for local food and a labour pool for farming operations. Both urban and rural residents use the trail systems and can help grow the market for local, Greenbelt businesses. Rural communities provide the urban population with local and healthy food options, trail systems for recreation, and a connection with natural areas and ecosystems.

### **8. Fosters cross-jurisdictional dialogue**

The Greenbelt encompasses natural systems that cross municipal boundaries, links rural communities faced with common issues related to sustaining their viability, and showcases challenges related to the rural/urban interface. The Greenbelt also creates

an opportunity for cross-jurisdictional dialogue and collaboration, both across municipalities and between municipalities and the province. While these discussions have begun within the agricultural community, there is significant municipal interest in expanding collaboration to other Greenbelt-related issues.

### **9. Leverages civil society partnerships**

The Greenbelt's recognizable landscape has provided the not-for-profit and charitable sector with a number of opportunities to promote their conservation, education and advocacy mandates. The Greenbelt brand is used by organizations working on issues such as active transportation, agriculture viability or conservation. In addition to leveraging funding, the identifiable landscape provides a point of collaboration for dozens of stakeholder groups, not-for-profit organizations and government. Leveraging the commitment and interest of civil society is a key opportunity for advancing the objectives and legacy of the Greenbelt.

### **4.2 Capturing the Full and Long Term Value of the Greenbelt**

As a land base alone, the Greenbelt will not achieve its full potential. To ensure the longevity and effectiveness of the Greenbelt, it must resonate in the minds of the people who occupy it, use it, and live nearby. Just five years into implementation, pressures to diminish and adjust discrete areas of the Greenbelt land base are becoming evident. The best strategy to not only protect this asset but also to capture the full value offered by the Greenbelt is to ensure that efforts to advance the Greenbelt objectives are addressing all facets of its potential. To do so, initiatives, strategies and policies must reach beyond the traditional land use focus to foster agricultural and economic viability, healthy towns and hamlets, well-functioning natural systems and the wise use of resources. Innovation will be necessary and needs to be found in the form of integrated solutions and collaborative efforts. Finding ways for the public, land owners, businesses and municipal stakeholders to understand and partake in the Greenbelt's assets is key to growing the Greenbelt constituency. Through these key shifts in emphasis lies the greatest potential to capture the full value of this landscape legacy.

Based on the findings of this research and perspectives offered by municipal and provincial staff, there are a number of opportunities for the provincial and municipal governments to move toward achieving the full range of Greenbelt Plan objectives.

## **1. Building on inter-ministerial coordination and commitment**

The land-use policies of the Greenbelt Plan have been, or are being, effectively implemented by municipalities with provincial guidance and support. In particular, the inter-ministerial coordination at the provincial level has been effective in: (i) ensuring that the Greenbelt's landscapes are protected for the uses intended by the Greenbelt Plan; (ii) developing a process and criteria for expanding the Greenbelt; and (iii) establishing the longer term performance measurement framework.

During the creation of the Greenbelt and Growth Plans, inter-ministerial collaboration was key to successfully developing the integrated directions and policies that are the backbone of these Plans. Now, as the municipal land use conformity approvals process, spearheaded by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, moves toward completion, is the time to renew inter-ministerial coordination to effectively move beyond the regulatory aspects of implementation.

Greater levels of coordination between ministries and collaboration with Greenbelt communities will advance progress in achieving the multi-faceted nature of Greenbelt goals for agricultural viability, natural heritage protection, natural resources, tourism and strengthening rural economies. For example, municipal staff underscored the value of an inter-ministerial inventory of provincial funding programs that would increase their ability to access, understand and leverage the full range of existing resources for which they would be eligible. Today, funding programs which range from OMAFRA's Rural Economic Development Program to the Ministry of Tourism's Celebrate Ontario Fund to the Healthy Communities Fund all support, but are not limited to, Greenbelt objectives yet they are not well known by many Greenbelt municipalities who could benefit from them.

## **2. Increasing collaboration at the provincial and municipal levels**

Achieving the full potential of the Greenbelt landscape will require strong collaboration and coordination of efforts between and within governments and stakeholders. Many municipal staff expressed interest in sharing and learning from the experiences of their colleagues in other municipalities.

Coordination does take place around specific Greenbelt topics such as agriculture, through the Greater Toronto Area Agricultural Action Committee, rural economies through Greater Toronto Countryside Mayors' Alliance, and related to greenlands strategies (Peel, York, and Durham Regions). Opportunities to expand these intergovernmental exchanges would allow for ongoing dialogue to regularly touch base on progress, challenges and innovations on a wide range of topics related to implementing the Greenbelt Plan. By doing so, Greenbelt municipalities may be able to learn from each other's experiences, leverage resources and share innovative approaches. The First Impressions program in Durham partners similar rural communities that offer one another an outsider's perspective on first impressions of their towns with the aim of improving the tourism and business environment. A similar model might be considered to link 'sister communities' across the Greenbelt to collaborate and share experiences.

Another opportunity for collaboration lies in information and data collection and sharing. Data collection is taking place throughout the Greenbelt area by provincial, regional and local governments and agencies. However, there is great variation in the level of data being collected, no consistency in collection methods and, with the exception of some provincial databases, limited access to data between Greenbelt communities. Many municipalities

recognize that there would be benefits to having access to consistent and integrated data and mapping on inter-municipal if not a Greenbelt-wide basis. The sharing of data, best practices, outcomes of pilot and demonstration projects, innovative practices and policies between government and stakeholders, was seen as a way to increase awareness of Greenbelt activities, encourage collaboration, and facilitate monitoring. At the same time, there was a recognition of the challenges in data collaboration. Initial recommended steps included sharing of existing data and over time determining protocols and methods to achieve greater consistency with the potential for using technologies such as an e-portal or web-2.0.

### **3. Advancing opportunities for innovation in the Greenbelt**

As a protected and diverse landscape, the Greenbelt can be a resource for experimentation, demonstration and innovation, in particular as relates to the Plan's goals. Several institutions located within the Greenbelt promote innovation including the Vineland Research and Innovation Centre in Niagara, the Muck Research station, and the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority's Living City Campus at the Kortright Centre in Vaughan. These centres are laboratories for developing sustainable agricultural practices and integrating renewable energy into agriculture and building design. As laboratories, these institutions support the key Greenbelt objectives. There is potential to grow this cluster of countryside-focused innovation with new centres of expertise related to local food distribution systems, advancement of sustainable rural settlements, healthy communities, culture and creative rural economies, or eco-tourism models.

Pilot and demonstration projects can help turn innovative ideas into best practices. New pilots could include models of monetary and non-monetary incentives for stewardship by farmers and rural landowners, ethno-cultural crop trials (which are already

being grown), more supportive policies for on-farm, value-added agriculture, new tools to encourage and support new farmers, and using technology to help market tourism across the Greenbelt. Pilot projects are also excellent models for fostering new partnerships and collaborative efforts between Greenbelt communities, government, business and institutions. As a legacy landscape with a need for innovative practices to achieve its full potential, identifying new pilot projects may not only create applied laboratories for new policy, incentives and tools but may also sow the seeds for future centres of innovation across the Greenbelt.

### **4. Reinforcing the Greenbelt as a critical consideration in making decisions around natural resource extraction and infrastructure development**

As the population of the Greater Golden Horseshoe grows and the economy grows with it, more natural resources to support development and new or expanded infrastructure will be needed. Given the proximity of the Greenbelt to urban areas, the expectation among many is that these resources will come from the Greenbelt area. However, in making such as determination the multiple objectives of the Greenbelt Plan need to be duly considered including ensuring a healthy environment, viable farming, a trails system, and recreation and tourism opportunities.

With respect to aggregate resource extraction, the Greenbelt Plan reflects the existing policies of the Aggregate Resources Act, the Provincial Policy Statement and the Natural System policies in the Plan. It does not allow new aggregate operations in significant wetlands and woodlands, and habitat of endangered and threatened species, nor in the Niagara Peninsula Tender Fruit and Grape area. The Plan also provides for more specific rehabilitation requirements than the Provincial Policy Statement. In some

municipalities, such as Halton Region, the impacts of aggregate extraction and the lack of site rehabilitation has resulted in the Region creating strong rehabilitation guidelines and monitoring procedures. Similarly, the Town of Welland in Niagara, with support from Niagara Region, has introduced additional policy protection from aggregate extraction near Fonthill Kame. These local initiatives exemplify the importance of and potential for more detailed, municipal policies that may be needed to balance and apply the overall intent of the Greenbelt Plan in a manner that addresses significant place-specific attributes.

Further, it will be important to ensure that the Greenbelt voice is always part of the discussion when highways, public transit, water supply and sewer infrastructure is being planned in the Greater Golden Horseshoe. The working relationship between MTO and the Greenbelt Council provides an example of how the Greenbelt's objectives have been considered in transportation planning. To ensure that the Greenbelt receives due consideration, the Greenbelt Council should be consulted as a key stakeholder and commenting agency on all major natural resource and infrastructure projects that are within and/or cut across the Greenbelt.

##### **5. Capturing the value of this legacy landscape and embracing the 'Big Picture' of the Greenbelt**

The Greenbelt is an extensive geography which embraces many communities, natural systems and jurisdictions. Within this landscape there are many layers of social, economic and environmental attributes; each contributing value beyond the local level. Within municipalities, there is strong awareness of the existence of the Greenbelt but operationally and within the community the understanding of the intra-regional value of the Greenbelt is not strong. In many instances, the Greenbelt

objectives and local objectives are mutually reinforcing but are not necessarily seen in this light. For example, the Greenbelt Plan and regional ambitions for viable rural communities are mutually supportive objectives. Continuing to advance the awareness and understanding of the Greenbelt entity at its landscape-scale potential, much in the way the Oak Ridges Moraine or Niagara Escarpment are understood, is critical to implementing the breadth of Greenbelt objectives. Finding synergies between the larger Greenbelt-wide scale landscape and systems and the distinct municipal-scale attributes will enhance the meaning of the Greenbelt within each community and ensure that the Greenbelt's full value is understood over time.

This can be achieved by continuing to advance the mapping and web resources that document activities and networks with greenbelt-wide connection such as trails, markets, bed and breakfasts, tourist attractions, farms and cultural centres. In addition, the creation of education and outreach resources on issues which are common to many Greenbelt communities may leverage limited resources and apply these in a Greenbelt-wide context. Coordinated outreach resources, such as Q+A's and communication campaigns, could help to address misunderstandings about topics such as value-added agriculture opportunities, conflicts arising from near urban agriculture and balancing natural resource protection with aggregate extraction. Finally, a framework to assess the "whole value" - cultural, ecological value and in particular the economic value - applied to Greenbelt assets and attributes would help to capture and communicate the full potential of the larger landscape. Initiatives such as the Greater Toronto Countryside Mayors Alliance Economic Analysis and ecological goods and services assessments are current examples that extend beyond traditional land use valuations. A number of municipalities identified the value of tracking current tourism activity and potential growth related to the Greenbelt but had no resources to undertake

this analysis. Further, the Greenbelt has the potential to provide employment opportunities that could be geared toward the growing labour force in the urban areas – environmental stewardship, trails and recreation, tourism and agriculture are all potentially growing industries that could partner through university or college technical programs. The creation of a whole value assessment would demonstrate the full potential, not just the land value, of these attributes and therefore of the Greenbelt itself.

### **4.3 Conclusion**

This report provides a snapshot of the progress upper tier municipalities and the province have made in achieving the objectives of the Greenbelt Plan. It is clear that there are a number of challenges and opportunities that have yet to be addressed. This Living Greenbelt Report provides the basis for further dialogue and collaboration between Greenbelt municipalities, the province and other stakeholders.



# APPENDICES

## A. SUMMARY OF MUNICIPAL INTERVIEWS

The following provides a synopsis of the interviews with municipal staff about their Greenbelt-related work. It includes an overview of progress to date, key messages and descriptions of initiatives that are underway. The time and scope of the project meant that interviews were held with available representatives of municipal departments. In some cases staff from up to seven departments were available; in others, as few as two. Interviewees were taken to be representative of their respective departments and the municipality. Not all the projects noted in this report are municipally-led, but they are included if they have an impact on the wider community and advance Greenbelt Plan goals.

### York Region

- Size of municipality: 1,776 sq km
- Size of Greenbelt within municipality: 1014 sq km / 69%
- Significant Landscapes: Holland Marsh, Oak Ridges Moraine
- Breakdown of Protected Countryside: 555 sq km / 55%.
- NEP: O. ORM: 459 sq km / 45%
- Settlements in the Greenbelt: 38, of which 7 are partially in the Greenbelt
- Toronto Region Conservation Authority, Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority; 17 Conservation Areas
- Regional Departments that are involved in the Greenbelt: Policy and Planning, Tourism, Regional Greening
- Greenbelt conformity mechanisms: York Region carried out a comprehensive review and update of its Official Plan (2009) which brought the Plan into conformity with Greenbelt policies. Specifically, Section 2.1: Regional Greenlands System: A Sustainable Natural Environmental Legacy reinforces the Greenbelt's Natural System through encouraging strategies and partnerships to implement the Region's Greenlands System. Section 5.5: Building Complete, Vibrant Communities reinforces the Greenbelt Plan objectives of retaining the rural character of hamlets while permitting limited growth through infill. Chapter 6: Agricultural and Rural Areas brings the plan into conformity with the rural and agricultural area policies.
- Active partnerships: Nature Conservancy of Canada, Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust, Ontario Farmland Trust, Oak Ridges Moraine Trail Association, Land Securement Working Group, Muck Crops Research Station of the University of Guelph.

## Overview

York Region has a strong connection with the Greenbelt given that 69% of the Region's area is within the Greenbelt. There is tremendous opportunity to build upon this connection given that all of the municipalities, with the exception of the Town of Georgina, have Greenbelt running through them. At this time, however, there have not been any regional programs initiated or expanded as a result of the Greenbelt Plan.

The Region has some of the richest agricultural lands in the province in the Holland Marsh, aptly labeled Ontario's "salad bowl". The nature of the farming community varies between municipalities. In Vaughan farmland is mainly tenanted and owned by speculators, Therefore, there is less investment in its long-term viability. However, just north of Vaughan, in King Township, agricultural practice is more predominant and more land is owned by farmers. The regional Agricultural Advisory Committee is less involved in regional policy development than its counterparts in Peel, Durham and Niagara.

York is well-placed to demonstrate leadership in demonstration projects, especially on value-added and environmental best practices. The Norfolk Alternative Land Use Services (ALUS) pilot project was of particular interest to the Region. The ALUS pilot project is an incentive-based farmer-led initiative that rewards the role that farmers play in environmental management. Pilot projects would be especially helpful to test strategies that support the Greenbelt Plan's objectives of viable agriculture and environmental programs.

## Key Messages

- Focused on advancing natural heritage objectives within the Regional Greenlands System.
- Despite significant and distinct agricultural areas such as the Holland Marsh, agriculture is less of a priority within York

Region as evidenced by the staffing model and the level of engagement of the Regional Agricultural Action Committee.

- Greenbelt implementation is seen as being focused on agriculture objectives and so the priorities between York Region and Greenbelt implementers are not strongly aligned

## Initiatives

**Holland Marsh Grower's Association** – The Holland Marsh Growers' Association was established in 2008 through a \$400,000 grant received from the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation. The Association is spearheading a market shift from serving primarily export markets to also serving local markets. Supporting the local market shift, many farmers are becoming certified through Local Food Plus. Complementing these efforts, the Muck Crops Research Station of the University of Guelph is located in the Bradford/Holland Marsh where the emphasis is on discovery research in crop management of the target vegetable crops.

**York Region Farm Fresh Association** – The Association represents a collective of farmers who pay annual fees to have their farm included in promotional materials distributed to hotels and tourist destinations. The Association aims to improve the awareness and economics of agriculture in the region by fostering more effective direct marketing via education, information, promotion and lobbying.

**York Region Food Charter** – York Region Food Network is in the planning stages of creating a food charter for the region.

**Agricultural pilot projects** - The Region recognizes that there are emerging forms of agriculture and environmental practices that could be supported through demonstration or pilot projects. Specifically, the Region is interested in Norfolk County's ALUS project. They are also exploring best practices in buffering on

farmland (farmers leave 10 strips of corn that could also act as a wildlife corridor) and there was interest in near-urban agriculture practices for urban-rural areas in places like Vaughan.

**Regional Greenlands System** – The original Greenlands System was established in 1994 and contains key natural heritage features and key hydrologic features and adjacent lands necessary to maintain this linked system. The Greenlands are connected to a larger landscape system that extends across the GGH and in some instance beyond. The system supports Greenbelt objectives for recreation and trails by providing opportunities for passive recreation in a future Regional Trails System.

**York Region Greening Strategy** – The Greening Strategy was adopted by Council in 2001 to implement the vision of the Greenlands System. It gives direction for the management and planning of forests, greenlands, natural heritage features, community education, stewardship and land securement. The Greening Strategy is delivered by York Region through a range of partnerships and coordinated by the Department of Transportation and Works and Planning and Development Services.

**Regional Greenlands Securement Strategy** – The Regional Greenlands Securement Strategy is one component of the broader Regional Greening Strategy. The mandate of the program is to guide the Region's securement activities and support land securement in areas that require protection or in areas which strategically enhance the Region's Greenlands system. Using tools such as stewardship, policy planning, monitoring and acquisition, the Region encourages owners of ecologically important green space to protect them for future generations through land bequests, donations, sale or creation of conservation easements. The program is carried out through partnerships with the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC), Oak

Ridges Moraines Land Trust, Ducks Unlimited and Conservation Authorities. The Greening Securement Strategy has an annual budget commitment of \$1,400,000.

**Land Securement Working Group** – The Land Securement Working Group was established in 2002 and includes representatives from the local municipalities, NCC, Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority, Rouge Park, Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust, Ministry of Natural Resources, Oak Ridges Moraine Foundation and Regional staff from the Planning and Development Services and Transportation and Works Department. The Working group meets four times a year to share information and to co-ordinate securement initiatives, to harmonize methods and criteria, and to foster ongoing communication.

**York Region Forest** – There are 22,000 ha in the York Regional Forest within 17 forest tracts that are owned and managed by the Region. Forest trails are managed co-operatively by York Region staff, the Regional Forest Advisory Team, and other user groups including the Oak Ridges Trail Association. The Regional Forest Advisory Team was established by York Region and MNR in 1994 as a vehicle to support the long term planning of the forest.

**“Nature’s Classroom” community education program** – This is one of a number of initiatives led by York Region Forestry, in partnership with the Regional Forest Advisory Team. The program raises awareness of forest ecosystem health and management. The initiative includes low and no cost educational opportunities, curriculum-based student programs, and programs for community groups.

**Regional Network of Natural Heritage Trails** – In 2007, York Region Council approved a Pedestrian and Cycling Municipal Partnership Program to assist local municipalities, conservation authorities and other agencies in the development of pedestrian and cycling infrastructure projects. The program will be funded

\$500,000 each year. As of 2009, the Region had contributed \$423,520 in matching funds to the program.

**Growing the Greenbelt initiatives: Markham Food Belt** – In January 2010 a motion was put forward by Markham Councilors Erin Shapero and Valerie Burke to have Town planning staff explore prohibiting urban expansion into Markham’s white belt (dubbed the ‘Food Belt’). The Food Belt would preserve 2,000 hectares for agriculture until 2031. As a result, future population growth would take place in the form of intensification within the existing urban area and/or be redistributed elsewhere within York Region. In May 2010, staff put forward a proposal to expand into the white belt so that approximately 1,000 ha would be developable and the remaining 1,000 ha would be studied by Town staff to determine whether it should become part of a Greenbelt expansion request. Council has not yet taken a position on a preferred growth alternative for Markham. Staff will report back to Council following further public consultation on alternatives for growth.

## Durham Region

- Size of municipality: 2,590 sq km
- Size of Greenbelt within municipality: 2,077 sq km, 80%
- Significant Landscapes: Ganaraska Forest, Oak Ridges Moraine
- Breakdown of Protected Countryside: 1,260 sq km, 74%.
- NEP: 0. ORM: 445 sq km, 26%.
- Number of settlements: 48, of which 5 are partially in the Greenbelt
- 5 Conservation Authorities; 9 Conservation Areas
- 7 Farmers Markets
- Greenbelt conformity mechanisms: Durham Region OPA 114 (2006)
- Active partnerships: Durham Agricultural Action Committee (DAAC), Durham Trails Coordinating Committee (DTCC), Durham Environmental Advisory Committee (DEAC), Durham Land Stewardship Council, OMAFRA, Algoma Orchards

### Overview

The Greenbelt spans a large part of Durham Region's landscape, extending from the northernmost area of Beaverton on Lake Simcoe to the urban edge of Lake Ontario. Durham Region has a unique relationship with the Greenbelt in that a large 'finger area' extends from the countryside through the urban area to Lake Ontario. This integration of landscapes has great potential to create better urban and rural linkages.

Durham Region has been particularly focused on Greenbelt objectives related to environmental protection and agricultural viability. Agriculture has been and continues to be a significant

economic driver. Agriculture is diverse with strong livestock (with just under 140 dairy producers), a growing sheep and goat industry and the largest concentration of beef farms (40%) within the Greenbelt. The Region's strong commitment to the agricultural industry is reflected in having established a regional agricultural liaison position in 2004 and a close working relationship with the regional agricultural committee. In terms of environmental protection, ROPA 128 has strong natural heritage policies that provide protection over natural features and connections with the Greenbelt and Oak Ridges Moraine. The Region provides land acquisition funding to secure lands within the Region's Greenlands System which reinforces the landscape of the Greenbelt (and vice versa). A large number of Durham farmers have signed on to the Environmental Farm Program. Durham Agricultural Advisory Committee and Durham Environment Advisory Committee have been hosting annual stewardship events across the northern municipalities that bring staff from MNR to talk about financial opportunities in environmental stewardship for farmers.

Moving forward, a challenge and potential opportunity for agriculture will be negotiating the land uses in the Greenbelt's 'finger areas', or the rural/urban interface, where there are tensions between farming and residential uses. These areas are also potential niche markets for the emerging practices of greenhouses, agri-tourism and smaller-scale agriculture. However, these emerging markets require flexible policies, pilot projects and funding. Given the nature of agriculture in Durham Region – commodity agriculture and export oriented – staying competitive and maintaining economic viability requires better transportation options and locating supportive infrastructure such as processing and inspection services closer to production. The Region's Economic Development department will soon be undertaking an agriculture cluster study to determine the feasibility of locating

agriculture infrastructure in the Region which could include inspection and processing facilities.

Northern municipalities within the Greenbelt face the challenge of sustaining long-term economic viability. The Region is not playing a large role in this area, but supports and encourages the efforts that northern municipalities are undertaking to explore alternative means for economic development.

#### Key Messages

- Greenbelt Plan implementation should be a more collaborative exercise between the province, the region and the municipalities, especially working through the details of implementation as they arise.
- Areas of the Greenbelt adjacent to urban settlements require a different policy set or at least policies that are more flexible to respond to this unique environment of residential and farm uses located in close proximity to one another.  
  
Education and communication on the intent of agricultural policies as they are applied in specific circumstances in the Greenbelt would help regions and municipalities better understand where there is flexibility in land use and room for innovation. Performance criteria rather than regulations would enable regions and municipalities to meet the intent of the Greenbelt but allow for localized policies that respond to local conditions.
- Many of the objectives in the Greenbelt Plan cannot be addressed solely through land use planning and need other supporting actions.
- Need better coordination of provincial legislation (Lake Simcoe Plan, Greenbelt Plan, Oak Ridges Moraine Plan, and Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe). Additional regulations

through the Lake Simcoe Plan are seen as hindering economic development in rural areas, which are already struggling under Greenbelt Plan policies that restrict growth and servicing.

#### Initiatives

**Gates Open Savour Durham Tour** – The tour promotes local food and the agriculture industry through a two-day self guided tour of farms throughout Durham Region. The program is organized by the Region and draws approximately 1,500 people to eleven farms over the two-day period.

**Durham Region Food Charter** – Durham Region established a food charter in 2009 that sets out priorities and actions that promote local food security at a region-wide scale.

**Durham Farm Fresh Marketing Association** – Established in 1993, the Association markets and promotes agriculture throughout the region through direct farm marketing, helping with product development and business plans and recruiting new farm workers. Recruiting new farm workers is done in part through the Pathways to Success career training program that includes skills training in the areas of meat handling, agricultural mechanics, and GPS diagnostics that support careers in agriculture.

**Durham Farm Connections** – Durham Farm Connections provides teachers with resources to educate students on where their food comes from. The Region coordinates the various program activities with the help of a large volunteer base. As a part of the outreach component grade three students are invited to become farmers for a day. Over three days, 1,200 students participate in learning about the agriculture chain from field to table.

**Annual farming stewardship event** – The annual farming stewardship events bring together staff from Ministry of Natural Resources and farmers of rural and agricultural lands to discuss financial opportunities. The events are held in the northern

municipalities of Durham and are co-hosted by the Durham Land Stewardship Council.

**Regional Greenlands Land Acquisition** - The Greenlands land acquisition fund was established in 2007 to help acquire land within the Regional Greenlands System. To-date acquisition of properties has primarily been within the Greenbelt area. The process of land acquisition is a partnership between the Region and the Conservation Authorities where the Conservation Authorities retain ownership of the properties while the Region provides acquisition funding of up to 40% matching funds.

**The Environmental Farm Program (EFP)** – The Environmental Farm Program (EFP) was created through OMAFRA and implemented through Ontario and Soil Crop. The take up of this program varies from region to region, but in Durham the program has been very successful with just under 50% of the farm community participating.

**Durham Regional Trail Network** –The Regional Trail network was proposed by the Durham Trails Coordinating Committee which was established with the mandate to create a public regional trail system. The Trail Network connects the Region of Durham municipalities, the Oak Ridges Moraine, Lake Ontario, Lake Scugog and Lake Simcoe and includes over 1,200 km of trails. The trail system is primarily implemented at the municipal level, through conservation authorities and local trail groups.

**First Impressions** – Historically, hamlets have provided a commercial hub for the outlying farm areas and maintaining this commercial role is a challenge that the region is taking on. First Impressions is a program partnership with OMAFRA for rural economic development focused on downtown revitalization. Through the program similar towns are partnered with one another. Delegations from each town participate on an exchange and are asked to report back on how they viewed the town

through the 'eyes of a visitor' (signage, website, marketing etc.). The purpose of the program is to improve towns in terms of tourism and business.

**Integrated Community Sustainability Plans (ICSP)** for Northern Durham (Uxbridge, Brock and Scugog) - In Durham, the settlement areas of Uxbridge, Brock and Scugog are in the midst of preparing an ICSP that will respond to, among other issues, restrictions on servicing and growth as a result of Greenbelt Plan policies. ICSPs provide another opportunity for settlement areas in the Greenbelt to develop new alternatives to sustainable growth. An ICSP is a long-term plan, developed in consultation with community members, that provides direction for the community to realize sustainability objectives, including environmental, cultural, social and economic.

**Growing the Greenbelt initiatives:** To-date there are no regionally-endorsed plans to expand the Greenbelt in Durham. Environmental stakeholders are exploring the potential for Greenbelt expansion in the Carruthers Creek area in Pickering.

## Niagara Region

- Size of municipality: 1,896 sq km
- Size of Greenbelt within municipality: 390 sq km, 21%
- Significant Landscapes: Niagara Escarpment, Fonthill Kame
- Breakdown of Protected Countryside: 281 sq km, 72%.
- NEP: 109 sq km, 28%. ORM: 0
- number of settlements: 19, of which 6 are partially in the Greenbelt
- 1 Conservation Authority and 29 Conservation Areas
- Greenbelt conformity mechanisms: ROPA 2-2009 Region of Niagara Sustainable Community Policies
- Active partnerships: Land Care Niagara, Niagara Parks Commission, Niagara Land Trust, Regional Chair's Task Force on Agriculture, Vineland Research and Innovation Centre

### Overview

Niagara Region is well known for its agricultural countryside, ideal for growing tender fruit and grapes. The region has an established agricultural history and regional staff have consistently been recognized for the important role that they play in supporting local agriculture. In addition to the agricultural landscape, the Niagara Escarpment and Fonthill Kame are important natural heritage features. Major trail systems run through the region and form the Greater Niagara Circle Routes Trail System. With the Greenbelt in place, the Region, in partnership with institutions such as Brock University and Bike Train Ontario have begun to use the Greenbelt as part of a branding strategy that integrates these features into agri-tourism, culinary tours and cycling vacations.

The Greenbelt creates long-term security in the preservation of agricultural lands in the region. This could provide a platform for re-inventing agricultural practices, encouraging research and innovation to ensure the industry remains economically viable. Institutions like the Vineland Research and Innovation Centre, as well as policy changes to allow value-added activities on farms, are examples of such research and innovation.

The Region has seen an evolution in the nature of agriculture-related businesses. While the closure of the Cadbury Schweppes juice plant in 2007 and the CanGro Canning Factory in 2008 have been of particular concern for producers and the community, these were linked to larger economic trends that broadly effect the agricultural industry. On the other hand, examples of agri-and eco-tourism growth in Niagara include the Niagara-on-the-Lake's diversification as a centre of theatre and culture to include wineries as a key tourism draw and the emergence of Jordan's combined offering of food, wine, trails and greenbelt landscape in a small rural setting.

The Fonthill Kame is an area of significant aggregate resource extraction. Recently, the Town of Welland and the Region have requested that the area of protection be enlarged to restrict aggregate extraction.

### Key Messages

- The Greenbelt provides an important backdrop to protect against long-term sprawl. It has created long-term certainty for the region, municipalities and landowners around the long-term status of their lands.
- The Greenbelt has not changed or fundamentally augmented regional initiatives on agriculture or natural heritage.

- Greenbelt work should now focus on outreach to farmers to ensure buy-in to the Plan. Farmers' support of the Greenbelt will help to ensure its legacy.
- There could be a central clearinghouse for provincial resources that support Greenbelt objectives such as mapping information, funding programs and best practices across the Greenbelt.
- There is potential to integrate cycling, tourism and public health and leverage this in the form of active transportation and sustainable tourism.
- A 'Greenbelt Economic Strategy' that complements the objectives of the Plan is needed to ensure long-term economic viability of the businesses within this landscape.

#### Initiatives

**Regional Chair's Agricultural Task Force** - A number of regional initiatives are supported through the Task Force including the development of an agricultural plan, "Growing the Industry: Farm Economic Viability for the Long Term", which highlighted the need to reduce land use restrictions and perceived property tax disincentives to on-farm value-added activities.

**Niagara Proposed Regional Policy Plan Amendment 6-2009 Agricultural Value-added Activities Policies** - These policies will facilitate farm diversification activities on agricultural lands. Draft value-added agricultural policies will become amendments to the Region's official plan and part of the Region's submission to the province for the review of the PPS.

**"Local Food Action Plan: Setting a Course for the Future of Food in Niagara"** – The Plan sets out a series of actions to support local food production, including: identifying local food producers, providing adequate food processing and distribution

infrastructure, creating awareness among consumers, commitments to purchasing local food policy for institutions and local businesses, reviewing and refining policies or practices to better facilitate production, increasing processing and distribution of locally grown food, and developing financial programs for producers and processors.

**Niagara ROPA 187** – This Official Plan amendment updates the Environmental Policies section of the region's Official Plan to conform with the Greenbelt Plan and the Growth Plan. The amendment updates the region's environmental policies to a landscape level, ecosystem approach that addresses natural heritage, and water resources.

**Water Smart Niagara** –The watershed-based protection strategy targets government, businesses and residents across the Niagara region and parts of the City of Hamilton and Haldimand County to raise awareness on how to best manage activities that affect our ground and surface water resources.

**Land Care Niagara** – Land Care Niagara is a not-for-profit community-based organization that provides services and information to rural landowners and other users of private and public lands in Niagara through educational outreach, training initiatives, and land stewardship activities.

**Niagara Culinary Trail** – the Culinary Trail links agriculture, tourism and the culinary community to promote sustainable cuisine. The Culinary Trail directly links itself to the Greenbelt landscape. The website provides a map of accommodations, restaurants, shops, wineries and farms as a resource for local food.

**Niagara Greenbelt Gateway Website** –The website is the first component of a larger project – The Niagara Greenbelt Routes and Discovery Centres project – which has been created through a partnership between Tourism Niagara, Brock University's

Department of Tourism and Environment, Niagara's Greenbelt municipalities and participating agencies, with support from the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation. The website is the main product of the project and features trip planning, itinerary building, mapping and directional capabilities, multi-media interpretive aids, user feedback features and a comprehensive database of Niagara Greenbelt points of interest. The purpose of the project is to create excitement and interest around the Greenbelt landscape and to encourage sustainable means of tourism.

**Bikeways Master Plan (2003)** - The Bikeways Master Plan is part of a multifaceted effort to develop a Regional Niagara Transportation Strategy that will address all modes of transportation in the Region and guide decision-makers over the next two decades. The Master Plan includes 330 km of bike trails and 16 major trail systems.

**Greenbelt rides** – The Region, through Tourism Niagara, actively promotes tourism in the Greenbelt by sponsoring programs that encourage tourism through cycling. The Tour de Greenbelt takes place on an annual basis in municipalities within the Greenbelt. The day long ride takes participants to local farms, to taste local foods, to wineries, and through the Greenbelt countryside. Other cycling and tour events include the Ontario Bike Train, Ride for Cancer and the Heart and Stroke Ride. These events bring people into the Greenbelt and showcase the many different activities it has to offer.

**Greater Niagara Circle Route Trails System** – The Greater Niagara Circle Route Trails System is comprised of four major trail systems (The Friendship Trail, The Niagara River Recreation Trail, The Waterfront Trail and the Trans Canada Trail) with over 140 km of trails for walking and cycling. The trail system connects urban centres with the Greenbelt and the Niagara Escarpment the waterfront and rural and agricultural areas.

**Fonthill Kame aggregate protection** – The Region supported the decision of the Town of Welland Council to request that the Province (Ministry of Natural Resources) not reduce the area of protection for the Fonthill Kame in an effort to restrict aggregate extraction.

**Growing the Greenbelt initiatives:** The Lake Gibson Preservation Task Group is lobbying for the Greenbelt to be expanded to include the Lake Gibson corridor as a link to Shorthills Provincial Park. The Region will not be considering expansion requests until its growth management strategy has been approved by the province.

## Region of Halton

- Size of municipality: 967 sq km
- Size of Greenbelt within municipality: 426 sq km, 44%
- Significant Landscapes: Niagara Escarpment
- Breakdown of Protected Countryside: 236 sq km, 55%.
- NEP: 190 sq km, 45%. ORM: 0.
- Settlement areas: 14, of which two are partially in the Greenbelt
- 2 Conservation Authorities and 17 Conservation Areas
- Greenbelt conformity mechanisms: ROPA 38 incorporates the results of the Sustainable Halton process and a comprehensive review of the Regional Official Plan (2006)
- Active partnerships: Halton Agricultural Advisory Committee

### Overview

Halton Region's Natural Heritage System extends beyond the Greenbelt and covers 50% of the region including some farmlands. The recent Regional Official Plan amendment introduced an expanded natural heritage system and more robust policies in support of conservation of this system.

Within Halton Region the interests of agriculture and natural heritage have become polarized. The Greenbelt has created a backstop to urban growth and helped the region achieve its planning goals with this land base preserved. However, the farming community in the region has pushed back against what it views as layers of regulation – first the Region's natural heritage system followed closely by the Greenbelt Plan policies. From the interviews, it was noted that the farm community

perceives that politicians and the urban population tend to be much more environmentally focused and there seems to be less understanding and support for agriculture beyond the small-scale operations.

The agricultural landscape in Halton has supported a strong farming community. Agriculture is primarily on large parcels of land that are geared toward exports and nursery stock with nurseries being major employers in the region. The type of farming activities are only limited by water, but some farming operations have become creative in conservation methods. Sheridan Nurseries which has reduced water use by 60% through water conservation, funded through the Region's Agricultural Development fund. The Region recognizes the need to create better relationships with the agricultural community. In an effort to do this, the Region is looking to restructure planning services to include a planner/liaison person to advocate for agriculture, secure research grants, help with environment impact studies and promote a stronger focus on agriculture within municipal government.

Halton Region also has a considerable urban-rural interface that provides opportunities for emerging niche markets like near-urban agriculture increasing public awareness and access to the countryside. If the Greenbelt expansion takes place to extend through Oakville, the Greenbelt will be brought further into the urban areas and increase access through recreational trails. To further capitalize on this, there should be a stronger regional network of trails. At the moment, there is no regional cycling network.

Smaller communities in the Greenbelt like Action and Georgetown are having issues with servicing. Both have the capacity to grow further but restrictions on servicing have limited this option, at

least in the more traditional sense of growth. Both are looking at water conservation options and innovative alternatives to supplying services.

Aggregate extraction has a long history in Halton Region. Over the past 40 years there have been many aggregate pits, some staying open long after the operation has finished. In response, the Council has taken a hard stance on aggregate extraction and has requested stronger guidelines and monitoring to ensure that environmental management is happening. Although these policies are in ROPA 38, the program has yet to be implemented.

### Key Messages

- The Region is very supportive of the Greenbelt Plan concept because it preserves a quality of life that is important to the region. This is reflected in ROPA 38 which consolidates amendments to the OP through the Sustainable Halton process.
- The Greenbelt is a great concept but the province has “left it up” to the local municipalities to implement and work out all of the details and contradictions that arise through the conformity exercise.
- The biggest area of untapped potential is near-urban agriculture along the fringe urban/rural interface. This could be further supported through the promotion of programs, regional and municipal policies.
- Gentrification of the countryside is a very real threat to agriculture. There is a trend in buying agricultural land to build large estate housing and the current policy tools cannot restrict this.
- The Greenbelt provides a quality of life that attracts people to the region both to live and to visit.

- Staff at the Region would be interested in learning more about funding sources to further Greenbelt objectives. A central resource area would be very helpful to channel information.

### Initiatives

**The Halton Region Strategic Plan** – The Strategic Plan includes agricultural policies and strategies to sustain the viability of existing agricultural lands.

**Halton Food Council** – The Halton Food Council was established in May 2010. They have a draft Food Charter that is being circulated to regional stakeholders for consultation. The Food Council is not a committee of council, but rather the region is providing technical assistance through the public health department. The goal is for the Food Council to become self-sustaining.

**Halton Agricultural Advisory Committee (HAAC)** – HAAC is comprised of volunteer representatives from agricultural organizations and the farm community. It provides advice on matters that could impact Halton’s agricultural industry.

**GTA Agricultural Action Plan** – Halton Region is actively involved in this initiative to help keep the agricultural industry competitive given the economic, land use, and labour pressures that farmers face. The GTA Agricultural Action Plan is a development strategy to create a vibrant farm sector in the GTA. The plan covers economic development, consumer education, marketing local food, land use policy and ways to sustain co-operative working partnerships.

**“Simply Local” program**- This program was initiated by the Region of Halton to encourage the production and sale of local food products to people both in and outside the region. The aim is to support the continued viability of agriculture in Halton and encourage healthy eating and physical activity.

**“Eat Smart” restaurant program** – Halton Region coordinates Ontario’s Eat Smart program for the region. The program is an Award of Excellence program that recognizes top Ontario restaurants, schools, workplaces and recreation centres for providing healthier environments to their customers.

**“Halton Fresh Food Box Program”** – The Halton Fresh Food Box Program provides boxes of fresh vegetables and fruit that are pre-purchased at the beginning of each month by program participants for pick up at the end of the month. The produce is purchased locally from a wholesaler and local farms. Halton Region runs the program with partners St. Christopher’s Anglican Church and Halton Multicultural Council.

**“Halton Food for Thought Community Partners”**- This school snack program promotes the connection between healthy food choices and improved learning. The aim is to provide a safe, nurturing, fun environment for children’s nutrition programs within our schools. Halton currently runs 75 nutrition programs in 62 schools involving more than 1,000 volunteers that impact 17,000 students.

**“Farm to School”** – The Farm to School program provides Halton schools with improved access to locally grown vegetables and fruits. This program links farms with a sponsor school.

**The resource booklet “Family Fun in Halton (A Guide for Parents and Caregivers)”** – The resource booklet provides a “Simply Local” farm directory for information on pick-your-own operations and agri-tainment opportunities (Farm tours, etc.).

**Halton Hills Comprehensive Community Improvement Program (Revitalization Grant Program)** – Halton Hills Council has approved the Town of Halton Hills Comprehensive CIP program, which identifies the entire town as a Community Improvement Project Area. One of the programs areas to be addressed is agricultural and rural lands. The grant program in cooperation with the Region and OMAFRA promotes agri-business economic

development.

**Greenlands securement program** – The securement program has recently been established and is not as long-standing as programs in other regions. Since its adoption by Regional Council in July 2009, the program has acquired one property in public ownership. The funding was requested by Bruce Trail Conservancy (Speyside Sanctuary) for a 140 acre property in the Town of Halton Hills in the amount of \$200,000. As of 2010, there has been one active request by the Ontario Farmland Trust for funding. The amount of money contributed to the securement program was outlined in the 2010 capital budget as 0.5 million (\$500,000) a year which is projected to occur annually.

**Regional Forest** - Regional forests are located in the Niagara Escarpment area. There are 14 tracts in total covering 665 ha. They include wooded areas, wetlands and meadows. Management of Regional Forests is guided by the Halton Regional Forest Management Plan (MRFMP). Nine of the 14 Forest Tracts are considered to be Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESA). Six tracts form part of the larger Niagara Escarpment Plan Area.

**Conservation in settlement areas** – Similar to communities surrounded by Greenbelt in other regions, a number of communities in Halton are exploring water conservation measures to develop more innovation in how these areas are serviced.

**Halton Region ROPA 38 established policies related to monitoring aggregate resources** – The Region is becoming more restrictive in regulating and monitoring aggregate extraction. They have developed a best practices manual and are undertaking a study to examine the impacts of previous resource extraction.

**Growing the Greenbelt:** The Region is currently holding public consultations on growing the Greenbelt to include the Glenorchy preserve lands and 16 Mile Creek that connect the countryside to the lakefront along a ravine system.

## Peel Region

- Size of municipality: 1030 sq km
- Size of Greenbelt within municipality: 426 sq km, 44%
- Breakdown of Protected Countryside: 213 sq km, 47%
- NEP: 115 sq km, 25%. ORM: 130 sq km, 28%.
- Settlements: 15, with two partially in the Greenbelt
- 2 Conservation Authorities and 13 Conservation Areas
- Greenbelt conformity mechanisms: ROPA 24
- Active partnerships: Conservation Authorities, GTA AAC, Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust, Ontario Farmland Trust, Ontario Heritage Trust

### Overview

The Region of Peel is the only municipality within the Greenbelt that includes both the Oak Ridges Moraine and the Niagara Escarpment. These significant landscapes have the Region working to implement a number of provincial policies. To do this, the Region and the Conservation Authorities (CAs) work in close partnership to promote environmental stewardship. The Region sets out policies and strategic direction for natural area protection and provides funding for the CAs to implement programs based on these directions.

Within the Region there are both rural and environmental policy branches. The Region has a strong agricultural economy reflected in its close working relationship with the Peel Agricultural Working Group. The Working Group has led a number of initiatives to strengthen both agricultural protection and environmental stewardship. Its focus has been on updating regional and local

plans so that they are in conformity with provincial policies, including the Greenbelt Plan. Although initiatives to date have not been a direct result of the Greenbelt plan, they reinforce its objectives.

The Region has identified a number of emerging markets for further study. Urban and near-urban agriculture is of interest given the urban/rural interface. The Regional Official Plan envisions shifting toward more local markets given the large market in Toronto and local farmers' markets in Peel Region. Developing mechanisms for farmers to receive incentives for the provision of ecological services is an emerging discussion in the Region.

The creation of recreation and trails is a lower-tier mandate. The Region does, however, encourage active transportation through Official Plan policies and active transportation strategies. There are three major trails that run through the Region – the Oak Ridges Moraine Trail, the Caledon Trail, and the Bruce Trail.

The Town of Caledon has been the main source for mineral aggregates in the region. The Town OPA 161 Mineral Resource policies have refined the extent of aggregate resource areas and seek to balance aggregate extraction with the ecosystem, social and economic goals of the Town.

### Key Messages

- Actions and initiatives have not been driven by the Greenbelt so the initiatives underway should not be a measure of how effective the Greenbelt Plan is. The Region's objectives and drivers are similar to those in the Greenbelt, so the initiatives underway reinforce the Greenbelt Plan policies.

- Greenbelt program funding should be channeled through existing programs (for example, Environmental Farm Plans, as is the case) rather than creating new programs.
- Conservation sites should be used to promote the relationship between the Greenbelt and local food production. They are an opportunity for pilot projects and learning centres such as McVean Farm that is run by Farmstart.
- There is a perception among farmers that provincial funding is being directed toward communication and awareness programs that serve to promote the Greenbelt when the funding would be more effectively used to support agricultural activities.
- Agriculture has become over-regulated whereas the industry needs flexibility in policies that are able to minimize environmental impacts while allowing farmers to adapt their operations so that they are economically viable.

#### Initiatives

**Peel Agricultural Advisory Working Group** – The working group provides advice on a range of agricultural matters. They have led initiatives to support local agriculture such as the Grown in Peel guide that identifies locations of local farms to encourage residents to buy locally.

**Ecological goods and services** – Peel Region views this as an emerging policy area and, together with the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation, is funding Credit Valley River Conservation to undertake valuation studies of the ecosystem services provided by the wetlands in the Credit River watershed. This work will help provide the basis for launching a pilot program in the future.

**Peel Rural Water Quality Farm Tour** – Established in 2007, the Region provides funding for five years. To date, the Region has invested \$2.3 million funding with matching funding of \$1.1

million from participating farmers. The bi-annual farm tours are organized by Peel Agricultural Rural Water Quality Advisory Committee to demonstrate best practices around groundwater protection, rural water quality, agricultural best management practices as well as showcase opportunities for partnerships between municipalities, agencies and the farming community.

**Greenland Securement Program** – The program covers the entire region of Peel but most of the natural features are in the Town of Caledon. Conservation Authorities and the Land Trust work in partnership to find willing landowners for the program. The land securement areas coincide with the natural system in the Greenbelt. To date, three properties have been completed, one is in process, and two more have been identified. The selection of properties is based on the sensitivity of their features.

**Interactive Web-based Active Transportation map** – The region received funding from the Ministry of Transportation's Transportation Demand Management Grant program to create an interactive web-based active transportation map in 2008- 2009.

**Natural Heritage Systems modeling** - The Region has provided funding to Conservation Authorities to carry out natural heritage systems modeling that is science-based and will be available at the end of 2010.

**Growing the Greenbelt:** The City of Mississauga is moving forward with a request to expand the Greenbelt to include the Credit River Valley

## Hamilton

- Size of municipality: 920 sq km
- Size of Greenbelt within municipality: 716 sq km, 78%
- Breakdown of Protected Countryside: 614 sq km, 86%.
- NEP: 102 sq km, 14%. ORM: 0.
- settlements in the Greenbelt: 22 with one partially in the Greenbelt.
- Significant landscapes: Niagara Escarpment, Cootes Park
- Four conservation authorities
- Greenbelt conformity mechanisms: Hamilton Rural Official Plan (2006)
- Active partnerships: Rural Affairs Advisory Committee

### Overview

The City of Hamilton has a large land base within the Greenbelt (78%) which makes the Greenbelt a significant factor in how the City plans for its urban and rural areas. The Greenbelt landscape includes specialty crops, prime agricultural lands, rural areas and parts of the natural heritage system including connections with the Niagara Escarpment area. The Natural Heritage System developed by the former Region of Hamilton-Wentworth serves as the framework for conservation planning and management in Hamilton.

In Hamilton, agriculture and agri-business is the sixth largest economic sector. The agricultural landscape has shifted over the past years – there has been a decline in beef and cattle but a dramatic increase in greenhouse, horticulture, and mushrooms. There is potential for value-added activities to support agriculture

through farm-gate sales and agri-tourism activities. Hamilton is also working with the GTA AAC, the five regional municipalities, the OFA, and the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation to develop a strategy for agriculture across the Golden Horseshoe.

There have been a number of challenges with regard to the land use specifics of the Greenbelt conformity exercise. Hamilton's OPA conformity plan is currently before the Ontario Municipal Board over the issues of aggregates and the concept of rural versus prime and non-prime agricultural lands. The City is also unclear about Greenbelt policies on agriculture, specifically, whether these policies permit commercial infrastructure and on farm value-added activities.

### Key Messages

- Municipal initiatives were not driven by the Greenbelt Plan, but the protected land base is very helpful in having a certainty to the limits of growth.
- The Greenbelt has leveled the playing field so that there are fairly similar policies across the GTA and Hamilton Area which limits the 'race to the bottom' effect with respect to protection of agricultural land from development pressure or other non-agricultural uses.
- Working with and helping the farming community ensure long term viability of agricultural production is key to making the Greenbelt more than a secure land base.
- The municipality has carried out detailed mapping that they consider to more accurate than provincial data. More municipal input into the mapping process would help to align provincial and municipal data.
- In Hamilton, there is an extensive and growing trail system that connects and runs through parts of the Greenbelt including the

old rail trail and the Cootes to the Escarpment Park (over the escarpment). These trails provide a remarkable resource for the community to enjoy the Greenbelt.

### **Initiatives**

#### **Community Food Security Stakeholder Advisory Committee**

– This is a citizens’ committee with Councillors, agencies and regional departments represented. It has submitted a terms of reference to create a Food Charter.

**Pick-your own farms** – There are pick-your own farms in Ancaster, Stonycreek, but there is no connection in terms of marketing to the Greenbelt.

**Hamilton Cootes to Escarpment Park System** - The park system links 1500 hectares of natural areas owned by eight different agencies and organizations operating together under a new management system. The collaboration manages the over 1600 hectares connecting the Niagara Escarpment to Cootes Paradise Marsh, and includes a strategy to conserve key additional lands to protect ecological linkages.

**Hamilton to Brantford Rail Trail** – The 32-kilometre Hamilton to Brantford Rail-Trail is Ontario’s first entirely off-road, interurban hiking and biking trail. The trail runs along the completely resurfaced abandoned roadbed of the Toronto, Hamilton, and Buffalo Railway. It is owned and maintained by the Hamilton Region Conservation Authority.

## B. SUMMARY OF PROVINCIAL INTERVIEWS

Appendix B provides a synopsis of the roles, key messages and initiatives underway for each of the provincial ministries and agencies interviewed.

In interviews with provincial staff from ministries other than the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, we heard that their involvement with Greenbelt-related issues comes mainly through their participation in inter-ministerial committees, and when they are asked to provide comments on a planning application or proposed official plan amendment within the Greenbelt area.

Staff from the following ministries were interviewed for this report.

- Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing
- Ontario Growth Secretariat (part of the Ministry of Infrastructure)
- Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Affairs
- Ministry of Natural Resources
- Ministry of Tourism and Culture
- Ministry of Health Promotion
- Ministry of Transportation
- Ministry of the Environment
- Metrolinx (a provincially-created agency)

The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH) plays the lead role at the provincial level when it comes to the Greenbelt. It is the Ministry that was charged with creating the Greenbelt Plan leading up to 2005 and it is now working to ensure that the Plan is implemented through municipal official plans. The Ministry takes the lead on monitoring municipal conformity with the Plan and is developing performance indicators for measuring its effectiveness.

MMAH convenes inter-ministerial committees for particular initiatives such as determining criteria for expanding the Greenbelt, and developing the framework for measuring the effectiveness of the Greenbelt Plan. Staff from a selection of ministries including Infrastructure (the Growth Secretariat), Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, Natural Resources, Tourism and Culture, Health Promotion and Transportation sit on inter-ministerial committees where they represent the interests of their respective ministries and work collaboratively to develop

policy recommendations and design monitoring and measuring frameworks. MMAH works closely with the Greenbelt Council, providing administrative assistance and helping the Council liaise with other ministries.

The Ontario Growth Secretariat within the Ministry of Infrastructure is responsible for the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe. This regional land-use plan fits hand-in-glove with the Greenbelt Plan. It sets policies for how municipalities should plan for projected population and employment growth so that Greater Golden Horseshoe lands that are not in the Greenbelt are used efficiently. The Greenbelt Plan and the Growth Plan, taken together, provide very strong policy direction for curbing urban sprawl. Therefore, the Ministry of Infrastructure's greatest contribution to the implementation of Greenbelt Plan goals has been the creation of the Growth Plan itself.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs is responsible for supporting Ontario's agricultural sector and rural economies. Ministry staff were deeply involved in the development of the Greenbelt Plan's policies on agriculture. OMAFRA runs several programs to support the agricultural sector throughout Ontario. It does not have any programs specifically for Greenbelt farmers.

The Ministry of Natural Resources and the Ministry of the Environment played key roles in developing the policies for managing and protecting the natural systems within the Greenbelt. Staff in MNR's district offices now support municipalities in bringing their plans into conformity with many provincial-level environmental protection plans including the Greenbelt Plan. Ministry of the Environment staff provide guidance to municipalities and other ministries on the quality and quantity of water in the Greenbelt's hydrological systems.

The Ministry of Health Promotion works to encourage and support healthier living. Part of its mandate includes promoting and facilitating active lifestyles. As such, the Ministry contributed to the Greenbelt Plan's policies on parkland, open space and trails. Parkland, open space and trails are increasingly understood to be part of infrastructure and are thus enjoying more policy support in recent years.

The Ministry of Transportation was involved in the development of the Greenbelt Plan, particularly its policies on infrastructure. The Ministry has completed environmental assessments for future highways that would cross the Greenbelt and has consulted extensively with the Greenbelt Council in planning for transportation initiatives in and around the Greenbelt.

Metrolinx is a provincially-created agency tasked with developing a transit-oriented transportation plan for the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area. This plan, called the Big Move, is the third leg in the tripod of provincially-created regional planning policy. The Greenbelt Plan gives direction for where lands should be protected from urban development, the Growth Plan provides policies for where and how growth should be accommodated within the region, and the Metrolinx Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) provides direction for how residents will get around.

### **Key Findings**

- The Province is primarily concerned with defining and protecting the land base of the Greenbelt.
- Now that the Plan is in place, the MMAH is developing tools to evaluate the effectiveness of the policies of the Greenbelt Plan and has also developed criteria for evaluating requests to expand the Greenbelt.

- The MMAH takes the lead on Greenbelt-related matters. Its mandate is to regulate land-use and its Greenbelt-related work focuses on land use issues.
- The Greenbelt Plan's non-land use objectives are understood to be the purview of other ministries. However, as other ministries defer to MMAH on any Greenbelt-related issues, there is a gap in leadership at the provincial level when it comes to the coordination of the non-land use Greenbelt objectives.
- There are provincial initiatives that support the non-land use goals of the Plan but these were not created with the Greenbelt in mind. Many of them existed before the Greenbelt Plan and, although their objectives may coincide with the Greenbelt Plan's vision, most are offered province-wide and have no stated links to the Greenbelt Plan.

#### **Provincial Initiatives that support the land use objectives of the Greenbelt Plan**

*Supporting municipal conformity exercises:* All municipalities within the Greenbelt must amend their Official Plans to bring them into conformity with the Greenbelt Plan. Many lower-tier municipalities are still in the process of updating their official plans. The MMAH field offices and policy branch support municipalities in this work. Where proposed municipal plan amendments do not conform to provincial plans, MMAH works with municipalities to resolve the discrepancies and, if necessary, appeals the amendments to the Ontario Municipal Board.

*Evaluating the effectiveness of the Greenbelt policies:* MMAH is developing a series of performance indicators to measure the effectiveness of the Plan. A discussion paper outlining the first round of draft indicators was released in early 2010. It outlines proposed draft indicators for agriculture, natural heritage,

water, and some settlement policy indicators. The Ministry is working with municipalities to gather the baseline data for these performance indicators so that progress can be tracked consistently across the Greenbelt. There are no indicators yet for the policies on infrastructure, aggregates, tourism and recreation. MMAH has collected feedback from the public on the first series of performance indicators. The monitoring work is an ongoing process that will be used to support the ten year review of the Greenbelt Plan in 2015.

*Growing the Greenbelt:* The Ministry has developed criteria for adding lands to the Greenbelt. The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, in consultation with partner ministries, will use these criteria to consider municipal requests to expand the existing Greenbelt. The six criteria were developed following an intensive and collaborative process that involved representatives from other provincial ministries, the Greenbelt Council, and consultation with the public. Requests to grow the Greenbelt must be put forward by a single- or upper-tier municipality and be supported by a council resolution. The expansion area must be adjacent or have a clear functional relationship to the Greenbelt and must meet the intent of the vision and goals of the Greenbelt Plan. One or more of the Greenbelt systems must be identified and included in the proposed expansion area. The request must not impede the implementation of the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe and must not undermine complementary provincial initiatives such as source water protection, the Regional Transportation Plan and the Lake Simcoe Protection Plan.

No requests to grow the Greenbelt have been received by the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. However, several municipalities have expressed interest in growing the Greenbelt and MMAH has met with these municipalities to go through the criteria and provide guidance as needed. Most of the interest in

growing the Greenbelt so far has been to include river valleys. These represent an opportunity to connect the Greenbelt with Lake Ontario. MMAH will continue to advise municipalities that express an interest in growing the Greenbelt and will coordinate the inter-ministerial committee that will review requests as they are received. There is no deadline for requests and this is an ongoing initiative.

*Overseeing the implementation of the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe:* Growth Plan policies direct all major growth to serviced settlement areas outside the Greenbelt and encourage compact urban form which is necessary to ensure that enough land is available for long-term needs without putting pressure on Greenbelt. The Ontario Growth Secretariat and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing are working to ensure that the Growth Plan's policies are implemented through municipal Official Plans in the Growth Plan area (which encompasses the Greenbelt). The Growth Plan sets population and employment targets which municipalities must plan to accommodate. It does not allow for the expansion of urban boundaries into the Greenbelt and requires that a set of criteria be met to allow expansions into other lands in the plan area. It sets density targets for areas of concentrated growth, called Urban Growth Centres, and requires that suburban greenfield development be planned at higher densities. These policies, implemented through municipal official plans, aim to ensure that the Greenbelt remains free from development pressure.

*Implementing the Regional Transportation Plan:* Metrolinx's Regional Transportation Plan calls for 1,200 kilometres of new rapid transit lines within the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA). Once built, more than 80 per cent of people in the GTHA will live within two kilometres of rapid transit, compared to just 42 per cent today. This ambitious transportation plan

complements the Greenbelt Plan and the Growth Plan by supporting transportation infrastructure in areas that are planned to accommodate growth.

*Providing direction on natural heritage policies:* MNR is currently finalizing a series of technical papers designed to assist with interpretation and implementation of the natural heritage policies of the Greenbelt Plan. They provide guidance to municipalities in bringing their plans into conformity with the Greenbelt Plan and in responding to site-specific planning applications within the Protected Countryside of the Greenbelt. The papers were published in draft form in September 2008. Final versions have been prepared and are making their way through the Ministry's approval process (current as of May 2010).

*Policy interpretation, commenting on applications:* Now that the Plan is in place, staff from various ministries are occasionally called upon to provide policy interpretation as municipalities bring their Official Plans into conformity with the Greenbelt Plan. This work is coordinated through the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Once applications to expand the Greenbelt are received, MMAH will coordinate gathering comments from relevant ministries in order to evaluate the application and advise the Minister on how to respond.

#### **Provincial Initiatives that support the non-land use objectives of the Greenbelt Plan**

*Public outreach:* MMAH and the Ontario Growth Secretariat promote the Greenbelt and Growth Plans to the public through their websites, workshops, and Ministers' speeches. In addition, the Ontario Growth Secretariat does public outreach to educate and inform people about the need for growth management and to give people a sense of what a more compact urban form may look

like. It conducts annual workshops for teenagers to try their hand at designing denser downtowns and creates visual resources to demonstrate what efficient urban form can look and feel like. This outreach indirectly educates the public about the Greenbelt as the Growth Plan and Greenbelt Plans go hand in hand in shaping the region.

*Marketing and promoting Ontario foods:* OMAFRA's Pick Ontario Freshness is an umbrella marketing strategy that focuses on building awareness of and demand for foods grown and produced in Ontario. The strategy includes the Ontario Market Investment Fund (OMIF); a cost-sharing program designed to promote consumer awareness of Ontario-produced foods and encourage Ontarians to buy locally. The fund is available to farmers, processors, and industry associations who wish to promote Ontario foods. They apply to receive up to 50% of their project funding, to a maximum of \$100,000. The marketing strategy and OMIF cover all of Ontario.

*Funding economic development of rural areas:* The Rural Economic Development Program (RED), administered by OMAFRA, supports job creation and economic diversification in Ontario's rural communities. Alliances between individuals, businesses, NGOs and municipalities may apply for 50% and up to 90% of project funding. The priorities of the RED program are supporting the food processing sector, community revitalization and skills training. Successful projects have included the creation of an arts heritage destination at Alton Mill, and several downtown façade improvement revitalization projects. RED is available for projects throughout Ontario.

*Cost-sharing programs to enhance environmental stewardship on farmland:* OMAFRA funds the Environmental Farm Plan program whereby farmers prepare risk assessments of their environmental practices. They can then apply for cost-share funding to improve

environmental conditions on their farm. The program is delivered by the Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association which holds workshops to guide farmers through the preparation of an environmental farm plan. The Environmental Farm Plan program is available province-wide. Farmers with approved Environmental Farm Plans within the Greenbelt are eligible for additional funding through the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation to implement best management practices that involve energy conservation and green energy generation under the Greenbelt Green Energy Program for Agriculture.

*GIS and mapping resources:* MNR collects and provides up-to-date Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and maps of Ontario's natural systems to support sound management of these resources. The Ministry develops these maps and updates the data on an ongoing basis. Regional offices are refining wetland mapping which may help municipalities in identifying natural systems in their official plans – a requirement of the Greenbelt conformity exercise.

*Protecting and regulating aggregates:* MNR is responsible for managing Ontario's aggregate resources and contributed to the Greenbelt Plan policies on aggregates. When commenting on site-specific planning applications or when future applications to grow the Greenbelt are received, Ministry staff would assess the impact of any proposal on present and future aggregate resources.

*Funding development of the tourism industry:* The Ministry of Tourism and Culture manages two funds which may be accessed by organizations seeking to promote tourism within the Greenbelt. The Tourism Development Fund is available to support the creation or revitalization of tourism attractions, to support innovative product development, to enhance the quality of

tourism services through training and to assist communities with tourism planning. The Celebrate Ontario fund supports festivals and events throughout Ontario. The Ministry also undertakes Premier-Ranked Destination Frameworks - an assessment and evaluation tool used to catalogue and analyze a region's tourism amenities and attractions and identify opportunities for tourism investment and development. The Framework tools result in a strategic action plan for tourism to improve the region's performance in the tourism marketplace.

*Promoting, protecting and mapping trails:* The Ministry of Health Promotion developed a long term Ontario Trails Strategy in 2005. In order to provide the public with information about local trails, the Ministry of Health Promotion funded the Ministry of Natural Resources to undertake the mapping component of the Ontario Trails Strategy. MNR collects mapping information from various sources including municipalities, conservation authorities and outdoor recreation groups. It consolidates and standardizes the information and makes it available to the public through a searchable online map.

*Funding projects that promote healthy communities:* The Ministry of Health Promotion's Healthy Communities Fund is a cost-sharing program which provides financial support for projects that contribute to the health and wellness of communities. Local organizations or municipalities can apply from anywhere in Ontario for projects that support healthy living such as promoting physical activity or healthy eating. Several organizations within the Greenbelt have accessed this funding including the town of Aurora which received funding to create a Trails Master Plan.

*Funding projects that encourage alternative transportation:* The Transportation Demand Management Fund was created in 2008-2009 and is now in its second year. In its first year, it funded

13 municipalities to undertake projects to encourage walking, cycling, transit and trip reduction. Municipalities must match the funding. The 2009-2010 program offers grants up to a maximum of \$50,000 for one-year projects. The grant is open to all Ontario municipalities.

*Promoting carpooling:* The Ministry of Transportation has created high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes on two highways within the Greater Golden Horseshoe. These are a section of Highway 403 (between 401 and 407 in both directions) and a section of Highway 404 (southbound from north of Highway 7 to the 401. Northbound is under construction). HOV lanes may only be used by cars with at least one passenger. Carpool lots are also available at many locations within the GGH to encourage people to carpool and to reduce the number of single-driver vehicle trips.

*Improving walking and cycling access to GO stations:* Metrolinx's work includes a GO station access strategy. This strategy aims to improve walking and cycling access to GO stations. The strategy is in its early stages and Metrolinx is working to identify stations to be redeveloped as showcase stations. The focus is on getting people out of their cars to get to GO stations and travel to urban areas. However, once the station access strategy is completed, GO stations within the Greenbelt would be better able to accommodate people walking and cycling to the Greenbelt from urban areas. Metrolinx's plan also includes extending GO service to Greenbelt areas beyond rush hour service. All-day both-direction service would allow for tourism and recreation access by transit.

## C. GREENBELT RELATED PROVINCIAL FUNDS AND PROGRAMS

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### Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs

- Pick Ontario Freshness: an umbrella marketing strategy that focuses on building awareness of and demand for foods grown and produced in Ontario.
- Ontario Market Investment Fund (OMIF); a cost-sharing program designed to promote consumer awareness of Ontario-produced foods and encourage Ontarians to buy locally. The fund is available to farmers, processors, and industry associations who wish to promote Ontario foods.
- Rural Economic Development Program (RED) supports job creation and economic diversification in Ontario's rural communities. The priorities of the RED program are supporting the food processing sector, community revitalization and skills training.
- Environmental Farm Plan program whereby farmers prepare risk assessments of their environmental practices and then apply for cost-share funding to improve environmental conditions on their farm. Farmers with approved Environmental Farm Plans within the Greenbelt are eligible for additional funding through the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation to implement best management practices that involve energy conservation and green energy generation under the Greenbelt Green Energy Program for Agriculture.
- Ontario Small Town and Rural Development Infrastructure Initiative (OSTAR) helps to improve infrastructure, such as roads and water systems, in small towns and agricultural areas.

### Ministry of Tourism and Culture

- Tourism Development Fund: Funds projects that encourage tourism investment, tourism product development and industry capacity building.

- Celebrate Ontario fund supports festivals and events throughout Ontario.
- Premier-Ranked Destination Frameworks are an assessment and evaluation tool used to catalogue and analyze a region's tourism amenities and attractions and identify opportunities for tourism investment and development.

### Ministry of Health Promotion

- Healthy Communities Fund: a cost-sharing program which provides financial support for projects that contribute to the health and wellness of communities.

### Ministry of Transportation

- Transportation Demand Management Fund provides matching funds to municipalities to undertake projects to encourage walking, cycling, transit and trip reduction.

### Ministry of Infrastructure

- Canada-Ontario Municipal Rural Infrastructure Fund (COMRIF): Funded through a partnership between the Government of Canada, the Government of Ontario and the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, COMRIF invests in infrastructure improvements in Ontario's small towns and rural areas (the COMRIF program is sunsetting and being replaced by the federal government's Building Canada Plan which funds municipal infrastructure improvements.)





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