

NOTES FOR A STATEMENT TO THE LEGISLATURE
BY THE HONOURABLE LINDA JEFFREY
MINISTER OF MUNICIPAL AFFAIRS AND HOUSING
ON THE 9TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE GREENBELT

QUEEN'S PARK

TORONTO, ONTARIO

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to report to this legislature that this past Friday — February 28 — was the ninth anniversary of Ontario's Greenbelt.

Created by legislation in 2005, the Greenbelt was considered a major step in the prevention of development and urban sprawl on environmentally sensitive land in the province.

Our Greenbelt is a permanently protected area of green space, farm land, forests, wetlands and watersheds

I want to acknowledge the guests we have with us today in the visitors' gallery who have helped to make the Greenbelt such a great success:

Burkhard Mausberg, CEO of the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation, and Dr. Peter Victor, chair of the Greenbelt Council.

Both these organizations are great partners and leading advocates of this province's green spaces.

I also want to congratulate those municipal leaders who are working in their communities to see the Greenbelt expanded.

In particular, I want to thank Oakville Mayor Rob Burton — who happens to be a member of Municipal Leaders for the Greenbelt — for his leadership in advocating for the Greenbelt.

On February 10, the Town of Oakville unanimously passed a motion asking Halton Region to formally request that land along Fourteen Mile Creek be added to the Greenbelt under the Urban River Valley designation.

That request was echoed by Halton Region council last week, on February 26th.

In addition, I want to thank Toronto councillor Glenn De Baeremaeker, who tabled a motion on February 19 to designate public lands along the Humber River, the Don River, and Etobicoke Creek as part of the Greenbelt. It was adopted by Toronto council the next day.

And this past Friday, on the Greenbelt's anniversary, Mississauga council voted to have its public lands in that city's sensitive river valley systems, including the Credit River and Etobicoke Creek, be designated as part of the Greenbelt under the Urban River Valley designation.

Mr. Speaker, our government is grateful for the strong support of our municipal partners.

It is part of the reason for the Greenbelt's great success.

Many have worked to support the Greenbelt and the Greenbelt Plan since their inception on February 28, 2005.

The plan laid out the boundaries and the policies for the Greenbelt.

When our government came to power in 2003, we saw what years of unchecked sprawl had done to the Greater Golden Horseshoe.

We saw the growing gridlock. We saw the steady loss of farmland. And not just any farmland — the Greater Golden Horseshoe has more than half of the best agricultural land in all of Canada.

It was clear that without action, we would lose this vital piece of land forever.

Besides farmland, we were also losing sensitive environmental lands. Grasslands, woodlands, marshes and other natural heritage features were being lost.

Our government had to act to create new protections.

We met with municipal leaders, scientists, and environmentalists.

We met with the farmers who work the land. We met with land owners, developers and other stakeholders. And we met with the public.

The result, Mr. Speaker, was the Greenbelt Act of 2005.

An act, I might add, that the official opposition, including the leader of the opposition, voted against.

Despite the official opposition's unfortunate and short-sighted opposition, Mr. Speaker, Ontario now has the largest permanently protected greenbelt in the world.

We have greenspaces and working countrysides that, together, stretch from Rice Lake in eastern Ontario to Niagara in southwestern Ontario.

These protected lands also go north to the tip of the Bruce Peninsula. The Greenbelt includes the Niagara Escarpment —a UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve — and the Oak Ridges Moraine — one of Ontario's most significant natural heritage areas.

In all, the Greenbelt covers nearly 2 million acres. That's an area bigger than Prince Edward Island.

Mr. Speaker, the Greenbelt supports our rural communities that contribute so significantly to the Greater Golden Horseshoe's quality of life.

The towns, villages and hamlets on the Greenbelt provide economic, social and commercial benefits to the whole region.

In addition, the Greenbelt includes the tender fruit lands of Niagara, the cattle farms of Durham Region and the market gardens of Holland Landing.

In the summer and fall, farmers' markets overflow with the produce, meat and dairy products grown and raised on the Greenbelt.

In my home town, we are fortunate to have the Brampton Farmers' Market. Every Saturday from June to October, it's the place to go to buy fresh, local, in-season produce.

Mr. Speaker, I've pointed out the ecological, the environmental and the nourishing benefits of the Greenbelt, but let's not forget the fun!

The ski resorts, the hiking and biking trails, the caves, the campgrounds, and the wineries are all just a short trip away for southwestern and central Ontario residents.

Mr. Speaker, a year ago, we added 630 acres of provincially owned conservation lands in Oakville to the Greenbelt. These are called the Glenorchy lands.

That expansion was also initiated by Oakville. I want to thank Oakville Council, Halton Council and Environmental Defence for their work and the leadership in making the initial request for these lands to be added.

I look forward to future anniversaries when we can celebrate an even bigger Greenbelt.

When my colleague, now the Attorney General Minister Gerretsen, introduced the Greenbelt Act in this House in November of 2004, he began by asking a simple question: “What do you want the Golden Horseshoe to look like in the future?”

And because of our government’s belief in a strong economy, vibrant communities, healthy natural landscapes and thriving farmlands, the Greenbelt ensures the very best kind of planning and growth that preserves Ontario’s natural habitat for our children and our grandchildren.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.