

REPORT TITLE: Response to Provincial Consultation on Growing the Size of the Greenbelt

FROM: Kealy Dedman, Commissioner of Public Works

RECOMMENDATION

That the staff comments on the “Consultation on Growing the Size of the Greenbelt” as attached in Appendix I in the report of the Commissioner of Public Works, listed on the April 29, 2021 Planning and Growth Management Committee agenda, titled ‘Response to Provincial Consultation on Growing the Size of the Greenbelt”, be endorsed;

And further, that a copy of the subject report be forwarded to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, the Cities of Brampton and Mississauga, the Town of Caledon, Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, Credit Valley Conservation, Conservation Halton, Nottawasaga Valley Conservation Authority and Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- The *Greenbelt Act, 2005* provides for a mandatory review of the Greenbelt Plan every 10 years. The last review of the Greenbelt Plan concluded in 2017.
 - On February 17, 2021, the Province sought public comment on growing the size of the Greenbelt. Comments were due on April 19, 2021.
 - The initial focus areas for growing the Greenbelt are the Paris Galt Moraine and Urban River Valleys.
 - Regional staff continues to support the Ministry’s efforts to protect and maintain the Greenbelt and to consider where it may be appropriate to increase the size of the Greenbelt.
 - The potential expansion of the Greenbelt Plan Area to include portions of the Paris Galt Moraine outside the Greenbelt does not impact Peel.
 - Urban River Valley designations currently apply to all of the major river valleys in Peel connecting the Greenbelt to Lake Ontario, including the Credit River, Etobicoke Creek, West Humber and Main Humber River Valleys.
 - If proposals to increase the size of Urban River Valleys are considered by the Province, these should be based on topographic or ecological boundaries and not encroach into existing developed areas.
 - Comments regarding the consultation are proposed for Council’s endorsement including recommended criteria that should be considered by the Province if proposals to expand the Greenbelt are developed.
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Response to Provincial Consultation on Growing the Size of the Greenbelt

DISCUSSION

1. Background

The “Consultation on Growing the Size of the Greenbelt” was released on February 17, 2021 by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing. The posting is a policy proposal requesting feedback on ways to grow the size of the Greenbelt. The proposal identifies a study area focused on the Paris Galt Moraine and ideas for adding, expanding and further protecting Urban River Valleys (URV) as priorities. The consultation is also seeking suggestions on other potential areas to grow the Greenbelt. Comments for the proposal were due on April 19, 2021.

This report provides an overview of Regional staff comments that were provided to the Province in response to the consultation. A copy of the Region’s staff comments is included as Appendix I of this report for endorsement.

a) Context

The *Greenbelt Act, 2005*, established the Greenbelt as a broad area that is protected to preserve agricultural and natural heritage lands and promote social and economic activities while mitigating climate change. The Greenbelt Area includes lands covered by the policies of the Greenbelt Plan as well as the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan and Niagara Escarpment Plan. These plans work together with the Growth Plan to identify where urbanization should not occur. In Peel, the Greenbelt Plan Area covers approximately 57,650 hectares or about 81 per cent of the Town of Caledon and 46 per cent of the Region (see map in Appendix II).

b) Initial Focus Areas

The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing has identified two initial focus areas: A Study Area of the Paris Galt Moraine and URVs as initial priorities to consider expansions of the Greenbelt and has requested responses to the following questions.

What are your thoughts on the initial focus area of the Study Area of the Paris Galt Moraine?

What are the considerations in moving from a Study Area to a more defined boundary of the Paris Galt Moraine?

What are your thoughts on the initial focus area of adding, expanding and further protecting Urban River Valleys?

Do you have suggestions for other potential areas to grow the Greenbelt?

How should we balance or prioritize any potential Greenbelt expansion with the other provincial priorities mentioned above?

Are there other priorities that should be considered?

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2. Importance of the Greenbelt to the Region

The continued protection and potential expansion of the Greenbelt is important as it provides for the permanent protection of a continuous agricultural land base, significant landscapes in the Greater Golden Horseshoe Region and natural ecosystems.

In Peel, the protection of the Greenbelt's land base and natural systems is critical to supporting the Region's resilience to a changing climate and helps offset emissions in carbon sinks that include agricultural lands and natural areas.

3. Findings and Implications

a) The Study Area of the Paris Galt Moraine

The Paris Galt Moraine extends from just east of Belfountain in Caledon to an area southwest of Port Rowan in Norfolk County (see map in Appendix II). The potential expansion of the Greenbelt Plan Area to include portions of the Paris Galt Moraine outside the Greenbelt does not impact Peel as it is already located within the Greenbelt Plan and Niagara Escarpment Plan Areas. Within Peel, the Paris Galt Moraine's key features and functions are subject to protections in the Provincial Plans and the Region of Peel Official Plan.

b) Urban River Valleys

In January 2013, the Greenbelt Plan was amended to designate the major river valleys connecting the Greenbelt to Lake Ontario as URVs. The addition of URVs to the Greenbelt Plan Area included all of the major valley systems in Peel including the Credit River, Etobicoke Creek, West Humber River and Humber River. A URV designation has the effect of bringing the lands within the boundary of the Greenbelt Plan Area. Only publicly owned lands are subject to the policies of the URV designation. Lands with URV designations are subject to municipal official plan policies and certain policies of the Greenbelt Plan including those which promote the protection and enhancement of external connections to the Greenbelt. URV areas are often lands designated in municipal official plans for parks, open space, recreation, conservation and/or environmental protection.

The URV designation in the Greenbelt Plan currently applies to lands extending 60 m on either side of a river measured from the water's edge. With respect to whether the URV designation should be widened by increasing the 60 m on either side of a river, a review of existing URV mapping was undertaken in the Town of Caledon and the Cities of Brampton and Mississauga. The purpose of the review was to determine the extent of URV coverage and whether simply increasing the 60 m to delineate valley limits is appropriate.

Due to the narrow width of many valley sections and their location in built up areas, simply extending the offset would result in the incorporation of existing developed areas including tableland developed with residential and other uses within the URV. If the Province is considering revisions to URV mapping in the Greenbelt Plan, any revisions should be made on the basis of a defensible topographic or ecological boundary such as an interpretation of valley limits based on crest of slope mapping and not simply an increase to the offset.

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The Ministry's consideration of revisions to URV designations should also take into account that in specific areas urban valleys have been historically developed within floodplains and in some cases are subject to Special Policy Area floodplain designations including in Downtown Bolton or are areas undergoing re-urbanization including strategic growth areas such as at Port Credit in the City of Mississauga. Expansion of the URV designation in these locations should be avoided as it would result in misalignment of the policy intent of the Greenbelt Plan and not provide the policy framework needed to support appropriate planning for these areas.

c) Other Potential Areas to Grow the Greenbelt

In 2017, the Province consulted on whether proposed additions or deletions to the Greenbelt should be considered through the Coordinated Land Use Planning Review of the Greenbelt Plan, Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan and Niagara Escarpment Plan. Site specific amendments to the Greenbelt Plan were considered and adjustments to the boundary were made based on requests received. In Peel, the Greenbelt Area boundary was not adjusted based on the Province's review of criteria and requests considered at that time.

The continued protection of the Greenbelt in Peel should be the priority in any review of the Greenbelt Plan Area boundary as this area provides for the protection of the Region's significant landscapes, headwater areas of major watersheds, and areas with high concentrations of sensitive natural heritage features and areas.

If the Ministry is considering other areas to include in the Greenbelt, any expansion should build on the systems approach of the Greenbelt Plan and be directly and functionally connected to natural heritage, water resource or agricultural systems. Criteria to include additional areas should take into account current and future growth needs and should fully consider the current growth management exercises being undertaken by municipalities, including the Region of Peel, to conform to the Growth Plan.

The *Greenbelt Act, 2005* provides for a mandatory review of the Greenbelt Plan every 10 years. The last review of the Greenbelt Plan concluded in 2017. A comprehensive review of Greenbelt expansion priorities should be included in the next review of the Greenbelt Plan once municipal growth conformity exercises for the 2019 Growth Plan are complete and there is a better understanding of the GTHA's growth needs at that time.

CONCLUSION

In Peel, the Greenbelt currently includes extensive coverage of significant landscapes as well as headwater areas of major watersheds including areas with high concentrations of sensitive natural heritage features and areas.

The protection of the Region's water resource system, natural heritage system and agricultural system is governed by updated policy direction in the Provincial Policy Statement, Growth Plan, and the Region of Peel Official Plan, which is undergoing review to conform and be consistent with Provincial direction.

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APPENDICES

Appendix I – Regional Staff Response to Provincial Consultation on Growing the Size of the Greenbelt

Appendix II – Map of the Greenbelt Plan Area in Peel

For further information regarding this report, please contact Adrian Smith, Chief Planner and Director of Regional Planning and Growth Management, Ext. 4047, Adrian.smith@peelregion.ca.

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Reviewed and/or approved in workflow by

Department Commissioner and Division Director.