

Fact Sheet - Growing the Greenbelt. November 2015

Q: Why grow the Greenbelt?

- We know the Greenbelt works at protecting water and natural heritage. Growing the Greenbelt is about preserving these values that are important to Ontarians, while directing growth and development where it makes sense.

- ≡ The Greenbelt and Oak Ridges Moraine Plans have been successful at maintaining watershed conditions, including forest condition and surface/groundwater quality
- ≡ Polling data consistently shows that Ontarians value the clean water benefits of the Greenbelt higher than any other benefit

Q: Is it realistic to expect the Greenbelt to grow by 1.6 million acres?

- This is ambitious but protection on this scale is what is needed, and has the support of municipal elected officials and more than 115 community and environmental groups

- ≡ None of the identified lands are within existing or approved urban boundaries
- ≡ There is more than enough available land already approved for urban development to 2031 in the Greater Golden Horseshoe (GGH), to accommodate forecast population growth (an estimated 3.7 million additional people.) If land consumption rates continue to slow (because of market trends and increasing density) then these already approved lands will last even longer.
- ≡ An expansion of this scale is not unprecedented. The existing Greenbelt is almost 2 million acres, and many experts and elected officials believe this needs to be even larger to protect critical water resources. For example in June 2014 the Municipal Leaders for the Greenbelt called on the province to expand the Greenbelt by 1 million acres to “stand up for Ontario’s green spaces, watersheds, farmland and natural heritage systems.”
- ≡ Ontario has committed to a target of 17% of land protected as part of a network of core habitat and natural corridors. In southern Ontario, we are well short of this target at just 3%. Adding 1.6 million acres is a necessary step to achieving our internationally biodiversity commitments.
- ≡ Since European settlement southern Ontario has lost 3.6m acres of wetlands, and in the past 50 years almost 2.5m acres of farmland in south-central Ontario was converted to urban use.

Q: Is this something that needs to happen now or gradually over the next 10 years?

-This Review is our best and in some cases, last opportunity to protect these lands from development and urban sprawl. We are urging the government to make a strong commitment to protect these lands as an outcome of the Review.

- ≡ The Review Advisory Panel is expected to release its report in late November. The province will then come out with recommendations for changes to the Greenbelt and Growth Plans early next year followed by a second round of public consultation
- ≡ These areas highlighted in the map are all important from a source water or groundwater perspective, and all face threats from new urban sprawl development. We recommend they be protected now through this once in a decade opportunity afforded by the Coordinated Review.

Q: Is the Greenbelt responsible for rising house prices and limited supply of new homes in the GGH?

- Simply put: no. Two points to make clear: (1) We are not running out of land to build houses, and (2) The Greenbelt is not a factor in rising house prices

To back up (1):

- ≡ Growth is not “bumping up” against the Greenbelt – there is plenty of land (more than 1,000 sq km) designated for development to accommodate population growth until 2041 and likely beyond, due to changes in the way we build and shifting market trends.
- ≡ Land consumption is also slowing: Between 1991- 2001 the urban footprint of the GTAH expanded by 24% to accommodate about 1.1 million people (a 19% increase in people). However, between 2001- 2011 the urban footprint only expanded by 7 - 9% to accommodate 1 million people
- ≡ Suggests we are getting better at building in and up instead of out, which is the trend we must continue to manage the negative consequences of sprawl not the least of which is more traffic congestion. (Planning policy is doing its job!)
- ≡ The lands in the whitebelt (ie, between urban boundaries and the Greenbelt) is not needed for growth, given the existing land supply. This land should be preserved for continuing to supply people with local food, clean air and fresh water.

And to back up (2):

- ≡ Research from the Royal Bank, the Pembina Institute, the Neptis Foundation and the Teranet National Bank House show that other factors are causing increased house prices in the GTA
- ≡ These include: record low interest rates, increasing costs of labour and building materials, and favourable mortgage insurance rules
- ≡ Same trends are being seen across the country, not just in the GTA. Calgary (54%), Edmonton (62%), and Winnipeg (75%) have all seen increases more than Toronto (33%) between 2005 and 2011. And the first three cities listed don't have greenbelts
- ≡ Affordable housing does exist in the GTA but not in locations that most people want to live. 80% of GTA homebuyers want homes in transit accessible, walkable neighbourhoods, but there is a short supply of family homes in these locations and a hot market which drives up average prices.

Q: What about agricultural land - is this part of the map?

- The map and proposal is about protecting important and vulnerable water sources, which benefits everyone in the GGH - including the agriculture industry

- ≡ The need for agricultural protection is a conversation that will continue to happen through the second part of the Coordinated Review. We are keen to participate in that discussion
- ≡ The umbrella groups and their members support a viable agricultural industry and stronger agricultural protection. They also realize that farming relies on many other factors to be successful, including other provincial and municipal policies, and a local support network of businesses and infrastructure.

