

# AN INSPIRED CONVERSATION *ON GROWING THE GREENBELT*

BRIEF REPORT  
JULY 2016



## INTRODUCTION

Since 2005 the Greenbelt has successfully protected agricultural land, water resources, forests and other natural heritage features from urbanization. The Province of Ontario has recently completed a 10-year review of the Greenbelt Plan, presenting an opportunity to grow the Greenbelt in areas under threat from development.

## AN INSPIRED CONVERSATION

In response to the opportunity to grow the Greenbelt in Wellington County, the Wellington Water Watchers hosted *An Inspired Conversation* on February 18<sup>th</sup>, 2016 at the Puslinch Community Centre. There, panel speakers David Crombie of the Crombie Commission, University of Guelph lecturer and former City of Guelph politician Lise Burcher, Jeremy Grant of Seaton Ridge Communities Ltd., local farmer Gerry Stephenson and John Fitzgibbon of the University of Guelph School of Rural Planning and Development addressed stakeholders and land rights holders of Greenbelt expansion, responding to three prepared questions.

This document features a point-form summary of the panellist's answers. For a full transcript of the event, attendee questions, and issues arising please refer to the full report at the Wellington Water Watchers Greenbelt Campaign Website. Available at: <http://wellingtonwaterwatchers.ca/campaigns/growing-the-greenbelt/>

## RESPOND TO THE GREENBELT REVIEW

The #GrowOurGB coalition (consisting of the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation, Environmental Defence, Ontario Nature, the Oak Ridges Moraine Partnership, the Ontario Greenbelt Alliance and many other local and regional organizations) has prepared an excellent campaign website to promote growing the Greenbelt in areas all across Ontario. Available at: [www.growourgreenbelt.ca](http://www.growourgreenbelt.ca)

The website's *Take Action* tab can be used to send and/or edit a pre-written email to the Province urging them to grow the Greenbelt further into outer ring municipalities, permanently protecting source water.

Thank you for taking the time to read this summary, the full report, or other Greenbelt literature, considering the inspired ideas they contain, and engaging yourself in this important issue.

## MEET THE PANEL



**DAVID CROMBIE**

**P.C., O.C., O.O.N.T.  
FORMER TORONTO  
MAYOR, MP, FEDERAL  
CABINET MINISTER**



**LISE  
BURCHER**

***ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR,  
UNIVERSITY OF GUELPH.  
DIRECTOR, FEDERATION OF  
CANADIAN MUNICIPALITIES,  
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**JEREMY  
GRANT**

***VICE PRESIDENT,  
PLANNING AND  
DEVELOPMENT OF  
SEATON GROUP***



**GERRY  
STEPHENSON**

***RETIRED TEACHER,  
ORGANIC FARMER,  
DRUMLIN FARM***



**JOHN FITZGIBBON**

***PROFESSOR, SCHOOL OF  
RURAL PLANNING AND  
DEVELOPMENT,  
UNIVERSITY OF GUELPH***

## INTRODUCTION & STANCE

### DAVID CROMBIE

- Greater Golden Horseshoe (GGH) one of fastest growing regions in North America. Population to increase from 9.5 to 13.5 million by 2041.
- Land use planning in GGH shaped by four plans, *Niagara Escarpment Plan* (1985), *Oak Ridges Moraine Plan* (2002), *Greenbelt Plan* (2005), *Growth Plan* (2006).
- Province currently reviewing all four plans as one. Will make amendments public by June 2016.
- 87 Crombie Commission recommendations cover five themes. (1) Growing the Greenbelt. (2) Building complete communities. (3) Strengthening local economies by strengthening agri-food. (4) Fighting climate change locally. (5) Holding the government accountable.

### LISE BURCHER

- Need to look at municipal government as autonomous level of government. Not creatures of the Province.
- Must not put ourselves in position where we are one election away from having all our hard work undermined.
- Need to take more responsibility to avoid downshifting of what used to be considered significant development applications.
- Really need to deal with OMB.
- To take this on will require all our tools and resources for effective implementation.

### JEREMY GRANT

- Southern Ontario's growing population necessitates approx. 35,000 new housing units annually. Has to be accommodated somehow.
- Development in broader sense is necessary and important driver of economy.
- In development industry, we agree we need clean air and water, with a healthy and diverse ecosystem.
- Not a question of *should* we grow, but rather *how* should we grow.
- Should discuss growing the Greenbelt with eyes wide open. Based on supply-and-demand, there may be potential for increased cost.

### GERRY STEPHENSON

- Local food is sustainable and organic operations can feed the world. Poisoning of environment has to stop.
- Local farms should be hubs, in and of themselves sustainable, high quality and high yield.
- Local communities should be walkable, sensible, usable, transit-based and local food-based.

### JOHN FITZGIBBON

- Conventional farmers see the Greenbelt as an urban-driven agenda. Are worried they will lose property value. Not the case, as rural land cost continues to increase.
- Future rural Ontario will be more diverse, with Greenbelt contributing to that.
- Greenbelt can contribute to dealing with rapid changes in hydrologic cycle caused by climate change.
- Have been successful in increasing residential development in cities. Have failed to create commensurate job density.
- Need to solve water problem. Currently at limit of what we can take without pipelines.

## QUESTION 1

*The expansion of the Greenbelt doesn't have to be a yes or no proposition. What changes to the current expansion proposal would you make? What would your expanded Greenbelt look like?*

### DAVID CROMBIE

- Municipalities, conservation authorities and local bodies need to be part of process, but without Provincial leadership Greenbelt won't grow.
- Environmentalists and agriculturalists are ready to sing the same tune on number of important issues.
- Land development is harbinger of change.
- Need to pay attention to developers' needs and business models.
- Need to combine needs of ecology, economy and community. Will take real talent.

### LISE BURCHER

- Must look at what policies are already out there. Need to ask: What's the purpose of this new layer of protection? How do the policies fit together?
- Have been number of progressive initiatives in land use planning in last decade.
- Need to determine ground truths for policies. What do they mean for processes at local level?
- Eg. *Growth Plan* is a fantastic initiative. However, Guelph was promised money to implement, and didn't receive any.

### JEREMY GRANT

- Tremendously complex. Doesn't have to be a yes/no proposition.
- Possibility of expansion should be looked at carefully. Conversation will count on contribution by professionals with knowledge in groundwater, ecology, planning.
- Shouldn't throw out innovative solutions to servicing small urban centres. Existing regime of hooking up to nearby pipe limits housing choices.

### GERRY STEPHENSON

- Keyword is protection.
- Some farmers are protecting watershed, but more need to.
- Need protection from government intervention. Freedom for rural innovation, succeed or fail.
- Protection for local food, farms, arable land. How can we protect these while acknowledging people want freedom of choice when deciding where to live?
- Protection for marginal land. Doesn't support agriculture, but serves purpose of protecting groundwater.
- How do we control aggregate extraction while still maintaining roads and development?

### JOHN FITZGIBBON

- The Greenbelt is a tool and a planning instrument. Activity is at least as important as designation.
- Implementation is where we fall down. If Greenbelt is to be successful, will rely on additional legislation.
- Government very active in legislative approach, but we can't *police* this.
- Bottom line is success depends upon people deciding it is the right thing to do.
- Means farming the best land in the best way. A challenge for industry with such narrow margins.
- Biggest challenge for Greenbelt is lack of sensible transportation plan for Southern Ontario.

## QUESTION 2

*We know we are going to have to plan for climate change going forward. How can we plan to increase the resiliency of our communities and reduce our carbon emissions? What role do natural systems and watersheds play in adapting or mitigating climate change?*

### DAVID CROMBIE

- Province has *Ministry of Environment and Climate Change*. Responsible for moving advocacy down to practitioners.
- Finances do not allow municipalities to easily combat climate change. Need to find method of funding.

### LISE BURCHER

- Municipalities looking to invest more in meeting climate change targets.
- Municipalities going cap-in-hand to Province for funding not sustainable, consistent, dependable.
- Communities enhanced by insisting on very clear asset management strategies.
- Needs to be reallocation of resources. Only \$0.08 on the tax dollar goes to communities. That is not enough.

### JEREMY GRANT

- As developer, spend majority of time in implementation realm. Try to do best possible work within control.
- Have had tremendous surge in some elements. Energy efficient buildings, community energy plans. Guelph one of leaders in area.
- Coming along with other elements. Eg. Traffic planning, including roundabouts.
- Need to continue notion of density along corridors.
- New development opportunities, green and brownfield, need to push for mixed housing.
- In 1997 Province led initiative *Breaking Ground* highlighting alternative development. Why did we stop talking about this?

### GERRY STEPHENSON

- Need to look ourselves in the mirror and see we are responsible for climate change.
- As new farmer I had to consult books, conferences and other farmers.
- Joel Salatin farms only 80 of 400 acre farm, Polyface. Active as a local food hub for his community.
- Eliot Coleman's farm began '77 from 10 acres scrub in Maine. Now farms year-round in 14 unheated grain houses.
- Greenbelt would make these sorts of operations sustainable.
- One of biggest issues is transport and machinery cost. Lack of alternatives to diesel farm equipment.
- Need to embrace local food, water and waste management.

### JOHN FITZGIBBON

- Big part of dealing with climate change will be dealing with what's already inevitable.
- Going to get about 10% more precipitation in Southern Ontario. Increased storm frequency and severity.
- Freeze-thaw conditions will cause ice storms and damage to roads.
- Cover crops will become norm to protect soil.
- Groundwater may lower due to higher surface runoff, lower recharge. Means we need to manage moraines.
- Need to embrace low-impact development standards.
- 400-series highways encourage inefficient transport and produce contaminated runoff. Need to limit 400-series highways invest instead in express bus routes.

## QUESTION 3

*The population of the Grand River watershed (6,800 km<sup>2</sup>) is expected to increase by 30 percent within the next 20 years. This means 300,000 more people. How can we best expand the Greenbelt while accommodating this increase, and the accompanying need for more infrastructure, food, and resources? (Numbers from the GRCA 2009 Integrated Water Budget Report)*

### DAVID CROMBIE

- Refer to Commission's recommendation No. 1. Need to develop complete communities.
- Requires involvement by public and private sectors, plus multiple levels of government.

### LISE BURCHER

- Growth Plan has been very well received. Have seen high quality infill developments in Guelph. More planned for nodes, corridors, arterial streets.
- Have been successful due to long-term engagement of community. Face-to-face gatherings. Community approval.
- Calls for a re-evaluation of wants and needs. Shift of attitudes about intensification.
- Causing some to be fearful of present and future circumstances. Communication and understanding critically important.

### JEREMY GRANT

- Everyone who cares about community needs to engage in educating others.
- Development industry always trying to do good work. One element is risk reduction. How do you deal with risk of opposition to infill?
- Province and municipalities need to find innovative methods of education.
- Roundtable discussions a valuable tool for sharing ideas. Tremendous opportunity to learn from each other.

### GERRY STEPHENSON

- Protection through the use of hubs.
- Need to grow up, not out. Density will take mindset change for many people.
- Need to limit water extraction by big companies.
- Bottled water makes sense for emergencies, but not for everyday life.
- First Nations have set wonderful example for how to care for environment. Should be important and resourceful part of conversation.
- Communities need to be localized, and connected to others with efficient transportation.

### JOHN FITZGIBBON

- Can look at Grand River Watershed as Upper, Middle and Lower Watershed.
- Upper is agricultural, heavy soils. Middle is diverse, with moraines and urban development. Lower is mix of cultural environments and 2.5°C warmer on average.
- Cities need to cut water use. Rural areas not incentivized to protect water if urban areas just waste it.
- Greenbelt can protect recharge areas. Majority of recharge (Upper and Middle Watershed) contributes to base flow of Grand River.
- Greenbelt needs to deal with issue of drainage.
- Population growth not independent from climate change. Difficult problems that need to be tackled together.