

Growing Ontario's Greenbelt – Municipal Context & Benefits

The Greenbelt was created in 2005 to permanently protect critical water resources, sensitive natural areas, and prime farmland from urban development. These assets are integral to the long-term health and prosperity of the Greater Golden Horseshoe (GGH) and quality of life for its residents.

The Greenbelt also supports the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe's (Growth Plan) goal of directing the majority of new development to existing built-up areas. Population growth, outward expansion of urban areas and the associated loss of greenspace that serve groundwater recharge functions, all increase the risk to the long term viability of water supplies required for drinking water, agriculture uses and to sustain environmental features. Climate change – predicting more frequent, intense storms and also droughts - adds a layer of uncertainty to managing water resources.

Why Grow the Greenbelt Now?

Over the last 30 years, the Province has acted to alleviate development pressures in sensitive or critically important areas through a combination of legislation and policy documents. The Niagara Escarpment, Oak Ridges Moraine and Greenbelt protection plans and the Growth Plan all have a primary goal of protecting sensitive resources for future generations. In May 2017, the province concluded a two-year consultation and review of these plans. An expert panel chaired by David Crombie attended the consultations and delivered 87 recommendations to the province, including the need to expand the Greenbelt to protect vital water resources. The updated Greenbelt Plan reflects these recommendations.

The Greenbelt expansion proposal **addresses gaps in existing water protection** policies within areas experiencing increased growth pressures. While many municipalities should be commended for work completed to date to protect local ground and surface water systems, the Greenbelt provides an enhanced level of protection and certainty that is only available through Provincial legislation and its associated policy documents. The proposed Greenbelt expansion, combined with on-going municipal implementation of source water protection plans and protection of natural heritage systems provides the best opportunity to ensure the long term viability of water resources for current and future generations.

Pressures on local groundwater supplies are increasing – the opportunity to act is now.

The proposed Greenbelt expansion limits potentially damaging future land use activities within groundwater recharge areas. It is important to remember it's not a question of whether we need these lands for growth, but where growth should or should not happen. There is room to meet the growth forecasted for the GGH outside of the lands proposed to be included in the Greenbelt, with some municipalities already having more land than is needed designated for development (excess lands).

Greenbelt Compliments & Strengthens Existing Protections

Source Water Protection Plans

Source water protection plans specifically protect drinking water quality. Threat assessments help define highly vulnerable aquifers and in-take zones, and require development of mitigation strategies to minimize the risks to such areas. The proposed Greenbelt expansion supports the implementation of source water protection plans by minimizing the potential future threats that need to be addressed within such areas.

Greenlands / Natural Heritage Systems

These plans generally protect environmental features, including wetlands and aquatic habitats, with the aim of supporting plants, animals and associated natural communities . The Greenbelt helps to protect these features, while maintaining the permeability of land within critical recharge areas.

Protection of Agricultural Lands and Activities

The Greenbelt Plan prevents urban development, thereby enhancing the long-term protection provided through local official plans for farmland, environmentally sensitive areas and permeable greenspace. The Greenbelt also serves as a deterrent to land speculation, providing the farm community with certainty as to the future use of the land and the likelihood of return on investment in farm infrastructure.

Higher Standard of Protection

Stronger policy framework: The Greenbelt Plan requires ‘conformity’ of municipal planning documents vs. ‘consistency’ with PPS. Greenbelt policies are also oriented to ‘improve or restore’ vs. ‘no negative impacts’ in PPS.

Higher minimum protection standards on more features: The Greenbelt Plan protects all wetlands, smaller forest plots, mandates a 30m buffer, and protects key natural and hydrological features through site alternation or development thresholds including streams, springs and seepage areas.

Municipalities empowered to go above and beyond Greenbelt protection: The Greenbelt Plan allows municipalities to “adopt policies that are more stringent than the requirements of the Plan”, with the exception of adding restrictions to aggregate or agricultural operations. In the Greenbelt, new aggregate operations are not allowed in significant woodlots and wetlands or the habitat of threatened or endangered species. These are provincial protections and therefore less at risk of being challenged. The connectivity of the agricultural, water and natural systems is to be protected, maintained, or enhanced.

Additional Information

The Greenbelt's rural economy contributes **161,000 jobs \$9.1 billion annually** and its natural capital provides **\$3.2 billion in ecosystem services every year**.

Greenbelt settlement areas are still able to grow based on infill, intensification and modest expansions. The Greenbelt **does not affect landownership, change zoning or tax designations**.

By helping to direct growth to built-up areas, **the Greenbelt can help reduce municipal infrastructure and servicing costs**. For example, compact growth can cut infrastructure capital costs by 30% and operating costs by 15%. Compact urban growth also cuts transportation and housing-related greenhouse gas emissions by 50%.

Building more compactly in our urban areas provides the density needed to pay for infrastructure and services like transit.

Ontario's farm organizations support stronger limits on urban expansion.

Who Supports Expansion

A coalition of more than 120 community, environmental, and agricultural groups supports expansion of the Greenbelt to protect vital water systems. Thousands of residents have also shown their support. These features provide drinking water to residents, sustain farming, protect towns and cities against flooding and erosion, and increase resilience to climate change.

For more information please visit protectourwaters.ca