

**To: Mayor and Members of Council**

**From: Kelly Cook, Senior Planner, Policy and Community**

**Cc: Tim Commisso, City Manager**

**Heather MacDonald, Executive Director of Community Planning, Regulation and Mobility**

**Mark Simeoni, Director of Community Planning**

**Nancy Shea-Nicol, Executive Director of Legal Services & Corporation Counsel**

**Kyle Plas, Manager of Development Planning**

**Curt Benson & Dan Tovey, Region of Halton**

**Date: April 16, 2021**

**Re: Consultation on growing the size of the Greenbelt**

**ERO Number 019-3136**

On February 17, 2021 the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH) posted a policy notice on the Environmental Registry of Ontario (ERO), titled “Consultation on growing the size of the Greenbelt” (ERO # 019-3136). Comments are being accepted until April 19, 2021.

MMAH is seeking feedback on ways to grow the size of the Greenbelt and further enhance its quality, focusing on the Paris Galt Moraine and Urban River Valleys. The province has established the following guiding principles for this exercise:

* removals or land exchanges will not be considered;
* policy changes will not be considered;
* reduction of existing protections in the Greenbelt will not occur;
* Greenbelt Plan objectives, vision and goals must be supported;
* the existing amendment process must be followed;
* additions must connect physically and/or functionally to the current Greenbelt; and
* impacts on existing provincial priorities will be considered.

**Background**

The Greenbelt Plan and A Place to Grow: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (GGH) work together to provide a framework for where and how growth should be accommodated. The Greenbelt Area includes lands covered by the policies of the Greenbelt Plan, as well as the Niagara Escarpment Plan and the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan. Collectively, these plans identify where urbanization should not occur and provide permanent protection to the agricultural land base and the ecological and hydrological features, areas and functions within the GGH and beyond.

On February 27, 2015, the province initiated the “Co-ordinated Review of the Growth Plan for Greater Golden Horseshoe, Greenbelt Plan, Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan and Niagara Escarpment Plan” (ERO #, 012-3256), which identified opportunities for growing the Greenbelt as a key priority. On October 3, 2016, City Council endorsed staff report “PB-71-16: Halton Area Planning Partnership (HAPP) Joint Submission related to the Provincial Land Use Plans Coordinated Review”, which highlighted matters specific to Burlington.

With respect to the Greenbelt Plan, the City’s only comment was that the Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System should be recognized through the addition of general policies indicating a provincial commitment to support and protect the area, similar to the Rouge National Urban Park. In response to the feedback received through the Co-ordinated Review, the province released “Proposed amendment to the Greenbelt Area boundary regulation (part of the Co-ordinated Land Use Planning Review)” (ERO # 012-7198), which ultimately came into effect on July 1, 2017. These changes did not include direct policy recognition of the Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System but did result in the addition of 21 urban river valleys, including Grindstone Creek in Burlington.

For context, the Greenbelt Plan is structured to provide for the inclusion of publicly owned lands in urban river valleys that were not in the Greenbelt at the time the Plan was approved in 2005. These lands, while not part of the Protected Countryside, are part of the broader Greenbelt and assist in recognizing the importance of connections to Lake Ontario and other areas in southern Ontario. Given the symbolic nature of the designation and its limitation to public lands, the policies of the Greenbelt Plan for the urban river valley designation largely defer to municipal Official Plan policies.

Burlington’s feedback regarding the importance of the Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System was re-iterated during the subsequent provincial consultation on the “Criteria, methods, and mapping of the proposed regional Natural Heritage System for the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe” (ERO # 013-1014), which commenced on July 6, 2017. The mapping for the proposed Growth Plan Natural Heritage System included significant areas within North Aldershot and therefore also overlapped with portions of the Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System. Through a joint HAPP submission, Burlington commented that the inclusion of certain lands within North Aldershot is complementary to the objectives of the Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System but also flagged that it may impose constraints on development proposals that may be considered in accordance with Official Plan policies. However, HAPP comments also acknowledged that a review of the North Aldershot area policies was forthcoming via the Region’s ongoing Official Plan Review.

On February 9, 2018 the province announced its decision to proceed with the proposed criteria, methods and mapping of the Natural Heritage System for the Growth Plan for the GGH, subject to changes made as a result of public feedback. The majority of the proposed lands within the North Aldershot area were retained in the final mapping as they did not meet the provincial criteria for removal.

**Halton Region Response**

Through staff report [LPS29-21](https://edmweb.halton.ca/OnBaseAgendaOnline/Documents/DownloadFile/LPS29-21%20-%20Provincial%20Consultation%20on%20Growing%20the%20Size%20of%20the%20Greenbelt.docx.pdf?documentType=1&meetingId=4202&itemId=119061&publishId=68537&isSection=False&isAttachment=True): Provincial Consultation on Growing the Size of the Greenbelt (endorsed by Regional Council on March 24, 2021), Halton Region has indicated general support for the province’s efforts to expand the Greenbelt, including the consideration of the Paris Galt Moraine for further study. The Region is recommending that the province consider additional candidate study areas, focusing on lands west of the Growth Plan Natural Heritage System corridor in Halton Hills, and Fourteen Mile Creek south of North Service Road to Lake Ontario. The Region has also identified two smaller parcels on the edge of the current Greenbelt boundary that may be suitable as candidate study areas, along the Burlington-Milton municipal border west of Bell School Line and north of Sideroad 2.

At the time the Region’s report was prepared, Conservation Halton had not yet confirmed whether it would be proposing any lands for consideration. The City will continue to work with both Halton Region and Conservation Halton to confirm the final set of lands being recommended for further study by the Province, and to understand any potential impacts to Burlington.

Due to the short timeframe to provide comments, it was not possible to prepare a joint HAPP submission. However, the Region did engage directly with HAPP members to present its initial recommendations for feedback. In its submission to the province, the Region has also stressed the importance of providing opportunities for extensive public consultation regarding any lands being considered for inclusion in the Greenbelt Area.

**Conclusion**

Given the current extent of the Greenbelt Area within the City of Burlington, which encompasses the majority of the Rural Area and significant portions of the North Aldershot Area, there are no obvious candidate lands for further expansion at this time. Lands outside of the Greenbelt Area and outside of settlement areas also benefit from the complementary protections of the Natural Heritage System for the Growth Plan, affording Burlington a substantial level of protection overall.

Staff are satisfied that previous requests regarding the Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System have been addressed to the extent feasible, in accordance with current provincial policies. Unlike the Rouge National Urban Park, which is entrenched in federal legislation through the Rouge National Urban Park Act, the Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System is a voluntary partnership among both public and private landowners. Further, the EcoPark collaboration is based on more strategic management/stewardship objectives whereas the Greenbelt Plan and the Growth Plan apply strict technical criteria to establish designations to inform land use planning decisions.

At a high level, staff concur with the feedback provided in Regional staff report LPS29-21 and are satisfied that it represents the interests of Burlington insofar as it supports the general protection and enhancement of the Greenbelt. Based on the lack of direct impacts to lands within the City, staff are not recommending a Burlington-specific submission but will submit a copy of this memo to the Environmental Registry for information purposes.

The Regional feedback provided to the province is attached for your information.

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**Attachment:**

LPS29-21: Provincial Consultation on Growing the Size of the Greenbelt