



Lynda Lukasik's delegation to MPP Donna Skelly

RE: Growing Ontario's Greenbelt

Friday, April 16, 2021

Good Morning MPP Skelly

I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you today. I would like to use my 3 minutes today to underscore the reasons why the next 10 years are critical for the future of the planet and our ability to survive on it. This may sound like a harsh statement to make, but we are in a CLIMATE EMERGENCY and it is incumbent upon all of us – especially government – to respond with aggressive action to address the climate crisis. – ensuring that we avert climate catastrophe by preventing the average global temperature rise from going beyond 1.5 deg C.

We understand more now than we did even several years ago when Ontarians were last asked about where and how we wanted to see the Greenbelt grow, that the need to build a climate resilient province is essential. We must continue to take meaningful action to protect Ontario's rural natural systems and our precious prime agricultural land. Our ability to adapt to and to mitigate climate impacts depends on it!

The provincial Greenbelt Plan and Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe were intended to work in concert – to usher in effective urban growth management in order to ensure that important natural resources like prime agricultural land and significant natural features/ecosystems could be preserved – by building more compact, complete, climate friendly cities.

Your government has now invited Ontarians to, once again, provide our input on a proposal to grow the Greenbelt. In this instance, the government proposal is to include the Paris Galt Moraine, and to consider more urban river valley designations – as long as the URV in question is on publicly owned lands.

But, at the same time that this scoped opportunity is being provided, this provincial government continues to dismantle key provincial planning policies - including core policies within the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe - that are essential for keeping urban growth at bay . All of this when – due to the amplified urgency of the climate crisis - we must focus on building more climate resilient urban areas, and protecting more prime

agricultural land if we have any hope of building climate resilience in Ontario communities. Food security will become a higher priority issue as this decade unfolds. Extreme weather events will occur with more frequency so we need all of the 'natural attenuation' capacity that natural areas in our watersheds provide – not to mention the ability of greenspace to absorb CO2.

So, if you really want my opinion regarding what the province must do if the genuine goal is to build a viable Ontario for the future, I am crying out to you that serious action must be taken to grow our Greenbelt to protect the prime agricultural land that is now at risk of being consumed at an accelerated rate due to provincial planning policy changes that are only exacerbating outward urban expansion. We are witnessing the reality of the Ford Government's policy changes right here in Hamilton where our municipal planners are telling us that, to comply with provincial policy, they can't even consider the option of no urban expansion. We cannot accept that assessment. Given the existential crisis we are facing, this provincial government SHOULD BE putting in place protections to ensure that no more prime agricultural land is lost to urban expansion in southern Ontario. In the City of Hamilton, that would mean protecting the so-called 'white belt' lands – the rural lands that are wedged between urban Hamilton and the Greenbelt – land that is mostly prime agricultural land – like in the Elfrida area. Once you allow houses to be built on that land, that's it – and you can't eat houses.

But if I haven't convinced you that we are facing a crisis with the direction the provincial government's land use policies have taken us in, maybe this information from the Ontario Farmland Trust will convince you :

Every day in Ontario we lose 175 hectares of farmland to non-agricultural land uses like urban expansion and aggregate extraction; this rate of farmland loss is unsustainable and cannot be allowed to continue.

Dare I suggest that current government policies will only amplify this number. We are in a CLIMATE EMERGENCY – the provincial government must respond accordingly. Our future depends on it!

Thank You!