



April 2021

The Honourable Steve Clark  
Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing  
17th Floor, 777 Bay St.  
Toronto, ON  
M5G 2E5

Re: ERO 019-3136 Consultation on growing the size of the Greenbelt

Dear Minister Clark,

On behalf of the Ontario Nature Youth Council, we are writing in response to the government opening consultations with regards to expanding the Greenbelt. Many of our members are very interested in the protection and expansion of the Greenbelt so in advance we thank you for listening to our ideas.

The Ontario Nature Youth Council is a diverse provincial network dedicated to inspiring, connecting, and educating our communities while protecting wild species and wild spaces. With over 60 active Youth Council members across 35 communities from Leamington to Ottawa to Thunder Bay, we contribute to lasting, positive environmental changes in a variety of conservation initiatives and issues on the local and provincial levels.

We appreciate the consultation of expanding the Greenbelt, however prior to considering the growth of the Greenbelt, it is important that we be mindful of its current state. The Greenbelt plays a major role in the lives of all communities in Ontario. The bodies of water are instrumental and allow surrounding communities to access clean drinking water, while also housing a large variety of freshwater aquatic species. The Greenbelt itself is also an area where much of Ontario's food production resides.

With these considerations in mind, it becomes apparent that the Greenbelt itself needs to be conserved and protected while being expanded. The diverse forests in the protected land are integral to the health of our planet; clearing the forests in favour of urban sprawl would be incredibly detrimental in this regard. Furthermore, if the biodiversity within the Greenbelt is constantly disrupted, there is a risk of negatively affecting the habitats of native species. The original spaces must remain a high priority, as we need to conserve what is already in place and connect protected areas into one unified space.

We urge you to broaden the scope of the consultation aside from setting up more urban gateways into these natural areas. There are many other natural and agricultural areas that need to be included such as Simcoe County that is home to invaluable wetlands, aquifers, forests and shorelines. We are certain that if areas like these are subject to sprawl or other forms of development, we as a province will regret removing flood protection, habitats, carbon sinks, and a part of our province's identity.

The environment must not be sacrificed for economic growth. Economic development is only beneficial to society when working in tandem with environmental protection; otherwise, the environment will fall completely to the wayside. Highway 413 (GTA West) is a prime example of the prioritization of development over the maintenance of our natural spaces. Many studies have shown that there is no correlation between reduced pollution and increased highway area, and the building of highways often leads to further urban sprawl. Furthermore, the Greenbelt is also at stake in this particular project. It cannot be bisected by a development project that does not reduce travel time or service individuals who truly need transportation. Instead, it will contribute to habitat fragmentation as well as an abundance of other issues. We know the creation of a four-series highway is claimed as a separate project, however we urge you to think about what it means to protect our Greenbelt and honour true intentions of its creation in 2005.

In order to expand the Greenbelt responsibly, Indigenous communities and other voices need to be considered in all discussions. COVID-19 has inspired citizens to truly take advantage of the natural spaces Ontario has to offer, nurturing the understanding of the importance of the environment in benefiting mental and physical health. Any changes made to the Greenbelt, including any instances of Minister's Zoning Orders, should be clearly explained to the public in the same way a provincial budget would be. Moreover, Indigenous perspectives are critical to the changes in any land across Ontario. As the original stewards of this land who have cared for it for generations, Indigenous communities must be consulted in expansion projects pertaining to the natural environment in order to truly understand the best course of action for greenspace.

Lastly, a group of Ontario Nature Youth Council members created a short [video](#) highlighting our favourite statistics on the Greenbelt. We encourage you to take two minutes to hear their message.

We thank you for your time and trust that you will consider our viewpoints, as the expansion of the Greenbelt will benefit all residents of Ontario both in the present and into the future. We invite you to meet with us to discuss the expansion plan in a non-partisan manner; our members are passionate about the protection and growth of the Greenbelt. Should you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact one of the undersigned.

Yours sincerely in conservation and on behalf of the Youth Council,

Isabella Fiore and Sammie Heard

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### Supporting Signatories

