**Impact of the Proposed Cut to the Greenbelt on Human Health**

Our well-being is dramatically impacted by our neighbourhood design. Hundreds of Canadian studies, including dozens of Ontario-based publications, demonstrate a strong link between our health and various objectively measured community features.1 Our food environment, population density, and green space features impact our physical and mental health.

More than a third of Canadian adults have at least one chronic disease.2 Community design impacts our risk of injury, obesity, high blood pressure, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, cancer, anxiety, and depression.

We owe it to all Ontarians, as well as our future immigrants, to invest in urban design. We must avoid the low-density sprawl that is consuming our best farmland and polluting our air and water. We need walkable communities that promote physical and mental health and social engagement.

**Food Security:**

Minimizing the distance our food travels from farm-to-table reduces our costs and improves the quality of our diet. Closer proximity to healthy food sources reduces or helps prevent:

* Obesity3-10
* Diabetes11 and metabolic conditions12
* Cardiovascular disease13,14
* Anxiety and depression15,16
* Death14,17

This proposal threatens large tracks of the province’s prime farmland. It removes a significant portion of local food production from the province’s most populated region.

**Sensitive Ecosystems:**

Destruction of river basins elevates our risk for serious flooding which places human life at direct risk by drowning but also contributes to chronic respiratory disease by creating chronic mold problems within these homes.18,19

These ecosystems filter our drinking water. The loss of this function, and the added chemical run-off from roads and motor vehicles, pesticides and other landscaping uses contribute to a host of illnesses including cancer.20,21

**Air Pollution:**

The peripheral location of the proposed parcels of land, and the lack of public transportation infrastructure, ensures that the future residents of these proposed communities will be dependent on personal motorized vehicles for transportation. These car centric communities will create massive air pollution. Poor air quality contributes to chronic lung disease, cancer, and atherogenesis.22-26 Atherogenesis is the build up a plaque within blood vessels, which can lead directly to heart attacks and stroke.

**Community Design:**

Allowing this massive expansion of suburban sprawl in Ontario is bad for our health in other ways as well. The proposed focus on creating low-density single-family dwellings creates large distances between homes and their occupants’ daily destinations, disconnecting neighborhoods, making walking and cycling as a means of transportation unmanageable for the average citizen.

A neighborhood’s walkability is determined by how safe and convenient it is to walk from your house to essential services within the community. For example:

* Shopping and commercial services: grocery stores, pharmacies, and banking
* Community resources: schools, libraries, recreational centres, health and cultural services, and places of worship
* Public transportation (allowing residents to commute to work)
* Green space: natural habitats, recreational facilities, and public parks.

Walkable neighborhoods dramatically improve our health from birth through old age.

Studies have demonstrated a direct impact of green neighborhoods on pregnancy outcomes. A study performed in Vancouver demonstrated that mothers who lived in greener neighborhoods had healthier babies with higher birth weights and a smaller proportion of preterm infants.27

Children and adults in this province who can walk to school, shops, and essential services have better fitness and are less likely to be overweight or obese.3-5,28-36

Studies show that the people of Ontario who can walk their neighbourhoods have fewer chronic diseases like diabetes,11,13,29,32,33,37,38 better blood pressure and cholesterol control,12,39 and are less likely to develop the devastating complications of cardiovascular disease including heart attacks, congestive heart failure, strokes, and death.38,40-42,30-32

Access to parks and recreational facilities reduce the population’s risk of cancer.43

Our mental health is also significantly impacted by our physical environment. Proximity to community resources provides social support through health and cultural services and improves connections between people which helps to reduce anxiety and depression.15,16,39,44

**Safety:**

Infrastructure allows children and adults to remain mobile and active across their lifespan. Safe neighborhood design reduces the chances that our children are injured or killed while walking or cycling near home. Elderly individuals thrive from social connection, good sidewalk design and maintenance and reduced distances from home to destination decrease the risk of falls another serious injuries.45-56

**Summary:**

Protecting the environment is good for our health.

We must protect our most productive farmland, invest in public transportation, and ensure adequate healthcare, education, and recreational infrastructure to support neighbourhood growth and well-being. As we welcome new immigrants to our beautiful province, they deserve to be full participants in our communities and not live in marginalized peripheral regions that lack the infrastructure and the social supports necessary to allow these Ontarians to excel in their new environment.

It is irresponsible to hastily construct 50,000 homes while ignoring the marked detrimental effect the proposed community design will have on the health and well-being of the citizens who will live there. It is unconscionable to ignore the damage this construction will inflict on the health of the rest of Ontarians impacted through the destruction of our best farmland and pollution. Such poor design will reduce our quality of life and ultimately cost our healthcare system.

Avoid the suburban sprawl and save the Greenbelt.

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