

Sent by Email

March 26, 2021

The Honourable Steve Clark
Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing
steve.clark@pc.ola.org

Subject: Report PLN 14-21
Environmental Registry Posting 019-3136
Response to consultation regarding growing the Provincial Greenbelt
File: A-1400-001-21

The Council of the Corporation of the City of Pickering considered the above matter at a meeting held on March 22, 2021 and adopted the following Resolution #556/21:

1. That the comments in Report PLN 14-21, on Environmental Registry Posting (ERO) 019-3136 regarding growing the Provincial Greenbelt, be endorsed;
2. That the Province maintain the current established Greenbelt boundary within the City of Pickering on the basis that:
 - a. Any consideration or decision regarding expanding the Greenbelt in Pickering would be premature and not in the public interest, prior to the completion of the Region of Durham's Municipal Comprehensive Review and in particular, prior to the completion of the Land Needs Assessment, updated Natural Heritage System mapping, and review and implementation of the Provincial Agricultural System, in order to fully understand the implications and determine appropriateness of growing the Greenbelt;
 - b. All lands within Pickering are covered by the policies of A Place to Grow and the Greenbelt Plan, which were further strengthened through the most recent updates to the provincial plans, and the Provincial Policy Statement, and which together provide the highest level of protection for natural heritage and hydrologic features and areas, as well as agricultural areas; and,

- c. The City, by Resolutions 140/19 and 173/19 affirmed its position that the lands in Northeast Pickering, be reserved to accommodate future urban development;
3. That in order to minimize competing interests and priorities, the Province should explore opportunities on the outer fringes of the existing Greenbelt for further expansion, rather than the areas closest to the existing built up urban areas which may be needed to accommodate future development within proximity to transit and other existing and planned infrastructure investments by municipalities and the Province;
4. That should the Province decide to consider growing the Greenbelt within the City of Pickering:
 - a. Any additions to the Greenbelt Plan be considered in the context of the Region of Durham's Municipal Comprehensive Review;
 - b. The legislated public process for amendments to the Greenbelt be followed, including consultation with City of Pickering, the Region of Durham, Indigenous communities, and affected property owners, prior to any final decision being made;
 - c. Any decision to expand the Greenbelt should not compromise the ability of the municipality to accommodate future urban growth; and,
 - d. Criteria be established and implementation guidance be provided to guide refinement to the Greenbelt Natural Heritage System by municipalities, similar to the criteria and guidance that have been established for the Growth Plan Natural Heritage System; and,
5. That staff be directed to respond to ERO Posting 019-3136 with a copy of Report PLN 14-21 and Council's resolution thereon, and that a copy of Report PLN 14-21 be forwarded to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, MPP Peter Bethlenfalvy, the Regional Municipality of Durham, and other Durham area municipalities.

A copy of Report PLN 14-21 is attached for your reference.

Should you require further information, please do not hesitate to contact the undersigned at 905.420.4660, extension 2019.

Yours truly



Susan Cassel
City Clerk

SC:rp
Enclosure

Copy: The Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy, Member of Provincial Parliament, Pickering-Uxbridge
Ralph Walton, Regional Clerk/Director of Legislative Services, the Regional Municipality of
Durham
Nicole Cooper, Clerk, Town of Ajax
Becky Jamieson, Clerk, Township of Brock
June Gallagher, Municipal Clerk, Municipality of Clarington
Mary Medeiros, City Clerk, City of Oshawa
Leigh Fleury, Deputy Clerk, Township of Scugog
Debbie Leroux, Director of Legislative Services/Clerk, Township of Uxbridge
Chris Harris, Clerk, Town of Whitby

Chief Administrative Officer

From: Kyle Bentley
Director, City Development & CBO

Subject: Environmental Registry Posting 019-3136
Response to consultation regarding growing the Provincial Greenbelt
File: D-8000-007

Recommendation:

1. That the comments in Report PLN 14-21, on Environmental Registry Posting (ERO) 019-3136 regarding growing the Provincial Greenbelt, be endorsed;
2. That the Province maintain the current established Greenbelt boundary within the City of Pickering on the basis that:
 - a. Any consideration or decision regarding expanding the Greenbelt in Pickering would be premature and not in the public interest, prior to the completion of the Region of Durham's Municipal Comprehensive Review and in particular, prior to the completion of the Land Needs Assessment, updated Natural Heritage System mapping, and review and implementation of the Provincial Agricultural System, in order to fully understand the implications and determine appropriateness of growing the Greenbelt;
 - b. All lands within Pickering are covered by the policies of A Place to Grow and the Greenbelt Plan, which were further strengthened through the most recent updates to the provincial plans, and the Provincial Policy Statement, and which together provide the highest level of protection for natural heritage and hydrologic features and areas, as well as agricultural areas; and
 - c. The City, by Resolutions 140/19 and 173/19 affirmed its position that the lands in Northeast Pickering, be reserved to accommodate future urban development;
3. That in order to minimize competing interests and priorities, the Province should explore opportunities on the outer fringes of the existing Greenbelt for further expansion, rather than the areas closest to the existing built up urban areas which may be needed to accommodate future development within proximity to transit and other existing and planned infrastructure investments by municipalities and the Province;
4. That should the Province decide to consider growing the Greenbelt within the City of Pickering:
 - a. Any additions to the Greenbelt Plan be considered in the context of the Region of Durham's Municipal Comprehensive Review;

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- b. The legislated public process for amendments to the Greenbelt be followed, including consultation with City of Pickering, the Region of Durham, Indigenous communities, and affected property owners, prior to any final decision being made;
 - c. Any decision to expand the Greenbelt should not compromise the ability of the municipality to accommodate future urban growth;
 - d. Criteria be established and implementation guidance be provided to guide refinement to the Greenbelt Natural Heritage System by municipalities, similar to the criteria and guidance that have been established for the Growth Plan Natural Heritage System; and
5. That staff be directed to respond to ERO Posting 019-3136 with a copy of Report PLN 14-21 and Council's resolution thereon, and that a copy of Report PLN 14-21 be forwarded to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, MPP Peter Bethlenfalvy, the Regional Municipality of Durham, and other Durham area municipalities.
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Executive Summary: On February 22, 2021, Pickering City Council issued a directive for City staff to review and report back on Correspondence Item 14-21 from the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing regarding the Province's consultation on growing the Greenbelt. An Environmental Registry posting was published on February 17, 2021, for a 61-day commenting period, seeking feedback on ways to grow the Provincial Greenbelt. Comments are requested by April 19, 2021. In response to Council's directive, City staff have prepared an overview and response on behalf of the City and are seeking Council's endorsement of these comments.

Financial Implications: No financial implications for the City in adopting the recommendations of this report.

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is two-fold. The first, is to provide further information to Council regarding Correspondence Item 14-21 from the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH) as it relates to an Environmental Registry Posting seeking feedback on the Province's intent to Grow the Greenbelt. The second, is to obtain Council's endorsement of staff's comments to the Province on Environmental Registry of Ontario (ERO) posting 019-3136, regarding the Province's desire to grow the Greenbelt. This report contains an assessment of possible implications and comments on the ERO posting.

2. Background

Established under the *Greenbelt Act, 2005*, the Greenbelt was established to:

- protect against the loss and fragmentation of the agricultural land base and supports agriculture as the predominant land use;
- give protection to the natural heritage and water resource systems that sustain ecological and human health and that form the environmental framework around which major urbanization in south-central Ontario will be organized;
- provide for a diverse range of economic and social activities associated with rural communities, agriculture, tourism, recreation and resource uses;
- build resilience to and mitigate climate change; and
- allow critical new infrastructure and upgrades to existing infrastructure needed to serve the substantial growth projected for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, to be permitted subject to strong environmental conditions.

Through the 10-year review of the Greenbelt Plan, mapping of urban river valleys and associated policies were added to the Greenbelt Plan, which apply to publically-owned lands. At that time, the City provided comments regarding the review and update of the Greenbelt Plan in Report PLN 15-16 on September 12, 2016.

Within the City of Pickering, the Provincial Greenbelt covers approximately 11,050 hectares or 48 percent of the municipality. The current Greenbelt Boundary and Urban River Valleys are shown on Attachment #1 to this Report. Urban River Valleys that were added to the Greenbelt in Pickering through the 2017 Provincial Plan Update are the West Duffins Creek, Ganatsekiagon Creek, and Urfé Creek. The Rouge River Valley was added to the Greenbelt Protected Countryside through this update as well. Lands outside of the Greenbelt and the existing urban area are largely federally-owned and not subject to the provincial land use plans or are otherwise protected, with the exception of the lands in northeast Pickering. With regard to these lands, City Council, by Resolution 140/19 dated September 23, 2019, and Resolution 173/19 dated November 25, 2019 have taken a position that they will be needed for future growth. It should be noted that outside of the Greenbelt, the policies of A Place to Grow apply to all lands within the City of Pickering.

In the Provincial Government's 2020 budget, they pledged to expand the size of the Greenbelt, which is home to much of Ontario's environmental, groundwater, and agricultural resources.

3. ERO Proposal 019-3136

On February 17, 2021, the MMAH posted a proposal on the ERO for a 61-day commenting period, to seek feedback on ways to grow the size and further enhance the quality of the Greenbelt, with a priority of: lands focused on the Paris Galt Moraine (not applicable to the City of Pickering); and ideas for adding, expanding and further protecting Urban River Valleys. Comments are requested by April 19, 2021.

3.1 Principles for Growing the Greenbelt Expansions

MMAH has outlined a number of guiding principles as it relates to consideration of Greenbelt Expansions through this exercise:

- **No consideration of removal requests or land exchanges.** Through this proposal, the Province will not consider the removal of any lands from the Greenbelt.
- **No consideration of policy changes.** Any potential expansions will be based on and subject to existing policies. The province will not reduce existing protections in the Greenbelt.
- **Supports Greenbelt Plan objectives, vision and goals.** Lands to be considered for addition should support the Greenbelt Plan's objectives, vision and goals of providing permanent protection to the agricultural land base and the ecological and hydrological features, areas and functions occurring on this landscape, and providing for the inclusion of publicly owned lands in urban river valleys.
- **Follows Existing Amendment Process.** Amendments would be subject to the legislated public process set out in the *Greenbelt Act, 2005*. This would include requiring consultation with affected public bodies such as the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry and the Greenbelt Council, municipalities in the Greenbelt Area, Indigenous communities, and an opportunity for consultation with general public. This process would also ensure any proposed amendment does not reduce the total land area within the Greenbelt Plan.
- **Connects physically and/or functionally to the current Greenbelt.** The Greenbelt is meant to be a continuous broad band of permanently protected land. Any expansions shall build upon the systems approach of the Greenbelt Plan and should be directly connected or have a strong functional connection through the Greenbelt's natural heritage, water resource or agricultural systems.
- **Considers impacts on existing provincial priorities.** Expansions to the Greenbelt must consider their effects on other key provincial priorities outlined in the Provincial Policy Statement and A Place to Grow. These include:
 - Growth Management;
 - Natural Heritage and Water Resource Systems;
 - Agriculture; and
 - Infrastructure.

In particular, the Ministry is interested in hearing feedback with regard to:

- the initial focus area of the Study Area of the Paris Galt Moraine;
- considerations in moving from a Study Area to a more defined boundary of the Paris Galt Moraine;
- the initial focus area of adding, expanding and further protecting Urban River Valleys;

- suggestions for other potential areas to grow the Greenbelt;
- how the Province should balance or prioritize any potential Greenbelt expansion with the other provincial priorities; and
- whether there are other priorities that should be considered.

4. Staff Comments

City staff have undertaken a detailed review of the ERO proposal and provide the following comments. Key issues, comments, and concerns are outlined below and form the recommendations of this report.

City staff do not have any comments to provide as it relates to the Paris Galt Moraine since this is located west of the Greater Toronto Area.

4.1 Expanding and further protecting Urban River Valleys

With regard to the initial focus area of adding, expanding and further protecting Urban River Valleys, staff generally support this initial focus area. However, it should be noted that the current policies within the Greenbelt Plan related to Urban River Valleys only apply to publically-owned lands. Further, due to their characteristics, urban river valleys are largely non-developable and protected through other means including the Provincial Policy Statement and A Place to Grow policies that address natural heritage and hydrologic features and areas. Additionally, most of these areas also fall within the regulated area under the *Conservation Authorities Act*. Within the City of Pickering, the limit of development has already been established for much of these lands. Consequently, the expansion of the Greenbelt to include these additional lands would not necessarily result in the protection of more lands from development.

There may be a need to review and refine the boundary of Urban River Valleys through the Region's Municipal Comprehensive Review (MCR) to ensure that all publically-owned lands are included, in particular, any lands that might have been acquired since the time urban river valleys were added to the Greenbelt Plan.

4.2 Considerations for Growing the Greenbelt and Balancing Provincial Priorities

Although the Province is seeking suggestions for other potential areas to grow the Greenbelt through this consultation, staff notes that the Province itself acknowledges that there are a number of MCRs underway and that expansions need to be considered in the context of these growth management exercises, as discussed further in Section 4.2.1 of this Report. Staff are in agreement that **any expansions to the Greenbelt within the City of Pickering should be considered in the context of Durham Region's MCR. This will ensure that other provincial priorities including Growth Management, Natural Heritage and Water Resource Systems, and Agriculture are considered. To consider expanding the Greenbelt in advance of the outcome of the Land Needs Assessment, update of the Region's Natural Heritage System mapping, and implementation of the Provincial Agricultural System, would not be in the public interest.**

It is important that the Province balance or prioritize any potential Greenbelt expansion with the other provincial priorities. Staff provide the following comments related to each of the provincial priorities that have been identified.

4.2.1 Growth Management

The Greenbelt Plan broadly identifies where urbanization should not occur, and A Place to Grow directs the majority of growth to fully serviced settlement areas. Currently, upper and single-tier municipalities are working towards updating their official plans by 2022 to conform with the revised growth forecasts of A Place to Grow. Therefore, the Province has indicated that Greenbelt expansion needs to be considered in the context of these growth management exercises by municipalities. **Staff are in agreement with this statement.**

The detailed Land Needs Assessment criteria established by the Province, considers and balances matters of provincial interest including natural heritage and water resource systems, agricultural systems, and infrastructure.

Due to its location, existing and planned infrastructure, and other conditions, the City of Pickering is well suited to accommodate growth. **Any decision to expand the Greenbelt within the City of Pickering should not compromise the municipality's ability to accommodate future growth.**

To minimize competing interests and priorities, the Province should explore opportunities on the outer fringes of the existing Greenbelt for further expansion, rather than the areas closest to the existing built-up urban areas. In balancing provincial priorities, these lands may be the most appropriate and necessary to accommodate future urban development within proximity to transit and other existing and planned municipal and provincial infrastructure investments.

4.2.2 Natural Heritage and Water Resource Systems

As noted by the Province, both the Greenbelt Plan and A Place to Grow policies provide a high degree of protection for natural heritage and water resource systems, features and areas, including habitat for endangered and threatened species. Both the Greenbelt Plan and A Place to Grow contain policies supporting and protecting a Natural Heritage System that is made up of these natural features and areas along with the linkages that connect them together. Similarly, policies in these plans protect water resource systems on a watershed basis, with the Greenbelt incorporating significant headwaters, river corridors, wetlands and other features.

Further, where criteria and implementation guidance has been provided to allow for minor refinement by municipalities of the Growth Plan Natural Heritage System, no such criteria or guidance has been provided for the Greenbelt Natural Heritage System. **It is recommended that the Province establish similar criteria for refinement of the Greenbelt Natural Heritage System to ensure that minor refinement, that is in keeping with the intent of the policies and plan, can be made.**

As both plans provide a similar level of protection, at this time, staff is of the opinion that there is an adequate level of protection of the natural environment within the City of Pickering.

4.2.3 Agriculture

As noted by the Province, both the Greenbelt Plan and A Place to Grow have policies supporting and protecting an Agricultural System that comprises both an agricultural land base (prime agricultural areas, including specialty crop areas, and other productive lands that form a continuous land base for agriculture) and an agri-food network (infrastructure, services and assets that support the agri-food sector).

The Region of Durham is currently in the process of implementing the Provincial Agricultural System within the Region and will be refining the existing agricultural land base and agri-food network in collaboration with area municipalities through the MCR. **Until this exercise is completed, it is unclear which additional agricultural lands that currently lie outside of the Greenbelt, if any, might warrant inclusion within the Greenbelt Plan. Further, as both plans provide policy support for protection of the agricultural system, staff is of the opinion that there is an adequate level of protection for agricultural lands within the City of Pickering.**

4.2.4 Infrastructure

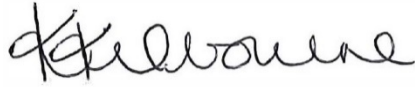
As noted by the Province, both the Greenbelt Plan and A Place to Grow recognize that new infrastructure and upgrades to existing infrastructure will be needed to serve the substantial growth projected for the Greater Golden Horseshoe. Infrastructure, including highways to sewage and water treatment plants to corridors for transit and utilities, are permitted in these plans subject to certain conditions.

Staff continue to support the development of necessary infrastructure in appropriate locations within the municipality.

Attachment:

1. Greenbelt Boundary within the City of Pickering
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Prepared By:



Kristy Kilbourne, MCIP, RPP
Principal Planner, Policy



Déan Jacobs, MCIP, RPP
Manager, Policy & Geomatics

KK:DJ:ld

Approved/Endorsed By:



Catherine Rose, MCIP, RPP
Chief Planner



Kyle Bentley, P. Eng.
Director, City Development & CBO

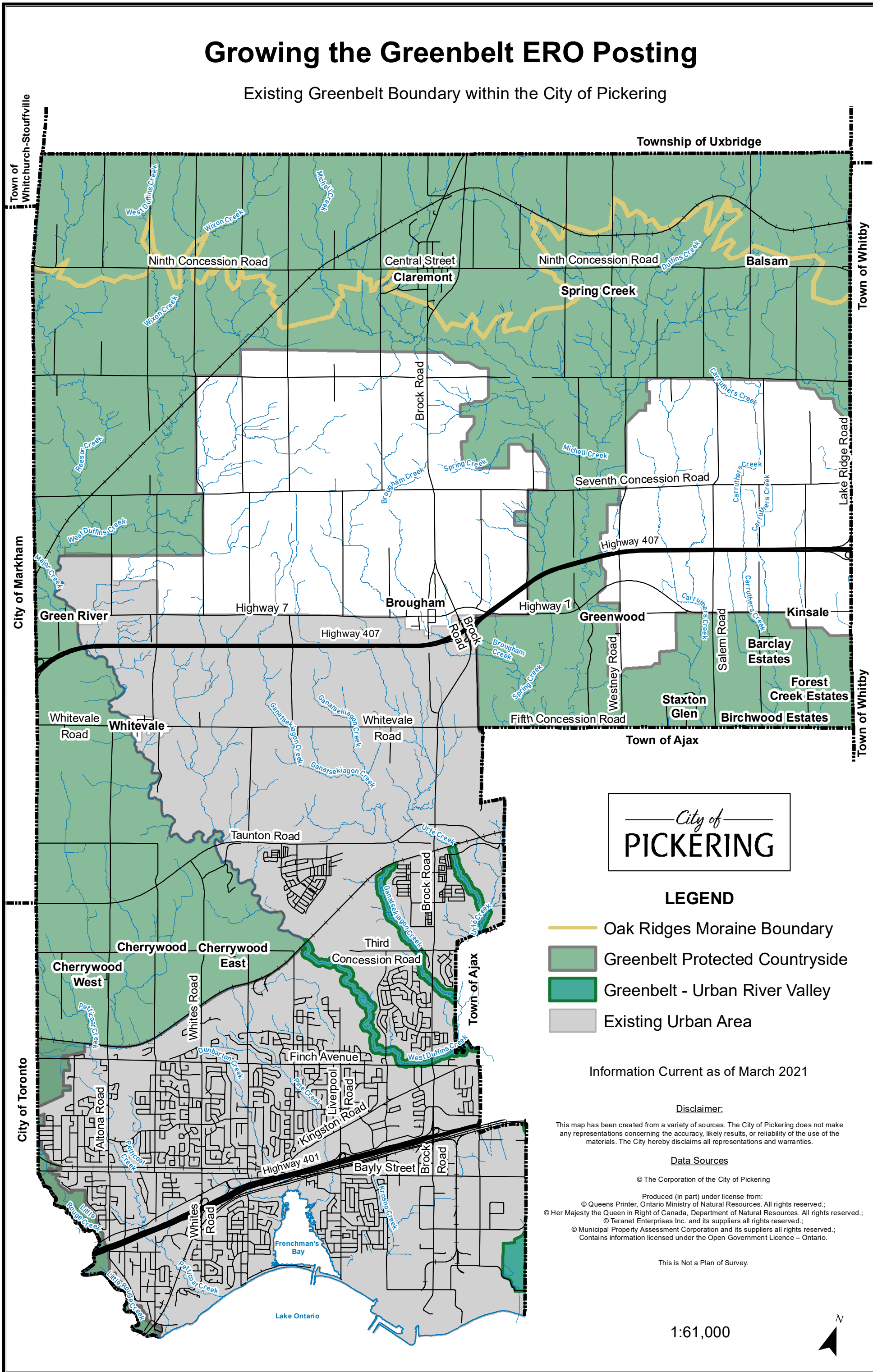
Recommended for the consideration
of Pickering City Council



Marisa Carpino, M.A.
Chief Administrative Officer


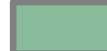


Growing the Greenbelt ERO Posting

Existing Greenbelt Boundary within the City of Pickering



City of
PICKERING

LEGEND

-  Oak Ridges Moraine Boundary
-  Greenbelt Protected Countryside
-  Greenbelt - Urban River Valley
-  Existing Urban Area

Information Current as of March 2021

Disclaimer:

This map has been created from a variety of sources. The City of Pickering does not make any representations concerning the accuracy, likely results, or reliability of the use of the materials. The City hereby disclaims all representations and warranties.

Data Sources

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