

December 1, 2022

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

Dear Minister Clark,

Re: ERO 019-6216 Proposed Amendments to the Greenbelt Plan; ERO 019-6217 Proposed amendments to the Greenbelt Area boundary regulation

We, the 78 undersigned organizations, are strongly opposed to the Ontario Government's proposal to remove 7,400 acres of land from the Greenbelt. Opening these lands to development would destroy vital wildlife corridors, negatively impact woodlands, wetlands and watercourses, and result in the loss of over 5,000 acres of farmland. The government's rationale – that these lands are needed for housing – is unfounded and untrue. We urge you not to proceed with this proposal for the reasons outlined below.

1. Abundance of land already available for housing

The amount of greenfield land already designated for development and added to municipal settlement boundaries, but still sitting unbuilt far exceeds what is needed to meet long range housing targets. That includes 86,500 acres within the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area alone. According to Ontario's Housing Affordability Task Force, "a shortage of land isn't the cause of the problem."

Land is available, both inside the existing built-up areas and on undeveloped land outside greenbelts ... Most of the solution must come from densification. Greenbelts and other environmentally sensitive areas must be protected, and farms provide food and food security. Relying too heavily on undeveloped land would whittle away too much of the already small share of land devoted to agriculture. (Housing Affordability Task Force, [2022, p.10](#))

The government should not be misleading the public with false claims that Greenbelt lands are needed to solve the housing crisis.

2. Harmful precedent and loss of permanent protection

The proposed removal of Greenbelt lands sets an alarming precedent, opening Greenbelt protected lands to development at the request of those who stand to reap

immense profits. Stripping these 7,400 acres of protection would unleash a firestorm of land speculation and development pressures across the entire Greenbelt.

The proposed removal is contrary to the vision of the Greenbelt Plan which emphasizes permanent protection:

The Greenbelt is a broad band of permanently protected land which:

- Protects against the loss and fragmentation of the agricultural land base and supports agriculture as the predominant land use;
- Gives permanent 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 southcentral Ontario will be organized;
- Provides for a diverse range of economic and social activities associated with rural communities, agriculture, tourism, recreation and resource uses; and
- Builds resilience to and mitigates climate change. ([Greenbelt Plan, 2017, \(1.2.1\)\)](#))

The importance of permanently protecting lands and waters within the Greenbelt cannot be overstated. It is key to building the resilience of local food systems, protecting at-risk habitats and species, and sustaining the physical, social and economic health of the nine million Ontarians living in the Greater Golden Horseshoe. Healthy ecosystems are the foundation of human prosperity and will become increasingly important for building climate resilience and providing refuge for rare and endangered plants and animals.

3. Negative impacts on the Natural Heritage System

The proposed land removals will negatively impact the Natural Heritage System. Most of the lands proposed to be removed from the Greenbelt (10 of the 14 areas shown on the [maps](#)) overlap with the Natural Heritage System. As explained in the Greenbelt Plan, 2017 (3.2.1), the Natural Heritage System “provides a continuous and permanent land base necessary to support human and ecological health in the Greenbelt and beyond.” It is vital to the ecological integrity of the Greenbelt and includes “the highest concentration of the most sensitive and/or significant natural features and functions.” These areas are to be “managed as a connected and integrated natural heritage system, given the functional inter-relationships between them.” Clearly, the proposal to remove lands from the Greenbelt’s Natural Heritage System contravenes the intent of the Greenbelt Plan to protect natural heritage.

Most of the land to be removed is in one area located on highly sensitive and ecologically important lands in the City of Pickering. This triangle of land at its widest point extends east-west for five kilometres between the Rouge River and Duffins Creek watersheds, and stretches south to north for 7.8 kilometres from just

north of Finch Avenue to Highway 407. It supports thousands of acres of largely prime farmland, numerous valleys, woodlands, wetlands and the entire critical headwater reaches of Petticoat Creek. These lands have major provincially designated wildlife corridors designed to provide east-west connections between the Rouge, Petticoat and Duffin Creek watersheds and north-south connections along the river valleys that connect Lake Ontario to the major east-west corridor of the Oak Ridges Moraine. The southern portion of this area also supports a highly sensitive band of wetlands and woodlands that is a recharge and discharge area on the former sandy beach of Glacial Lake Iroquois, a large version of today's Lake Ontario.

Other important areas that would be adversely affected include:

- A provincially designated wildlife corridor in King Township that provides a vital connection between the Holland Marsh and the Oak Ridges Moraine;
- A valley of the East Humber River in Vaughan that supports the endangered redbellied dace;
- A large wetland in Richmond Hill that is part of the provincially significant Rouge River Headwater Wetland Complex;
- Critical wildlife corridors in Markham that connect the Oak Ridges Moraine to Rouge National Urban Park;
- A large wildlife corridor in Markham at the sensitive headwaters for Robinson Creek, a tributary of the Rouge River, that supports a large cluster of provincially significant wetlands;
- A band of protected farmland between Ajax and Whitby that connects the coastal wetlands and woodlands of Lynde Shores and a large block of woodlands and wetlands to the north along the former beach of Glacial Lake Iroquois;
- A large provincially significant wetland in Clarington that is part of a sensitive groundwater recharge area;
- Large woodlots, wetlands and prime farmland in Hamilton along a sensitive headwater tributary of Big Creek; and
- Farmland in Hamilton and Grimsby designated as Niagara Peninsula Tender Fruit and Grape Area.

4. Land removals put the entire Greenbelt at risk

We do not support the government's efforts to sugar-coat the bitter pill of removing land from the Greenbelt by offering to add 9,400 acres to the Greenbelt. First and most importantly, this land swap would set an unacceptable precedent that would completely undermine the long-term protection of Greenbelt lands. In essence, it would be an open invitation to developers and land speculators to seek special permission from decision-makers to pave over parts of the Greenbelt.

Second, the proposed land swap will not compensate for the damage done. It would violate the fundamental and widely accepted premise that ecological offsetting should only occur as a last resort, when there are no other options to avoid or mitigate the

damage. Clearly that is not the case with the proposed land removals. The damage is entirely avoidable, given the many, many thousands of acres of land already zoned and ready for development within settlement boundaries in the Greater Golden Horseshoe. Further, some areas being proposed as replacement lands are already off limits for development (such as publicly owned lands designated in municipal official plans as parks, open space, recreation, conservation and/or environmental protection). Their addition would not in any way mitigate the net loss of protected lands.

Third, we take exception to the fact that the government is putting forward lands that were already part of previous Greenbelt expansion proposals – the Paris-Galt Moraine in 2021 and the Urban River Valleys in 2022. The government proposed these additions to the Greenbelt with great fanfare at the time, and yet has done nothing since to honour or respond to the thousands of Ontarians who supported and anticipated these expansions. To now tie this proposed expansion to soften the blow of removing lands from the Greenbelt is unacceptable.

5. Broken promises

The government has repeatedly stated that there would be no removal of lands from the Greenbelt. Premier Ford is quoted as saying in 2018, for example, “The people have spoken. I’m going to listen to them, they don’t want me to touch the Greenbelt, we won’t touch the Greenbelt.” He reiterated that promise in 2020, saying that his government would not “touch” or “build on” the Greenbelt, when facing criticism about the resignation of the chair and six members of Ontario’s Greenbelt Council. You, Minister Clark, made a similar commitment in February 2021 when you said, “I want to be clear: We will not in any way entertain any proposals that will move lands in the Greenbelt, or open the Greenbelt lands to any kind of development.”

Ontarians expect the government to honour its commitments.

Meaningful consultation with affected Indigenous Peoples

The government must meaningfully consult with affected Indigenous communities about the proposed amendments to the Greenbelt Plan. The duty to consult is a constitutional obligation that arises from s.35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982*, which recognizes and affirms Indigenous and Treaty rights. Indigenous traditional practices, responsibilities and knowledge systems must be honoured by ensuring Indigenous voices are key to any discussions about removing lands from the Greenbelt.

Closing remarks

The Greenbelt was created almost 20 years ago to help ensure natural and prime agricultural lands are permanently protected from sprawl development. Today, an intact and resilient Greenbelt is needed more than ever. Not only are we facing the interconnected and accelerating crises of climate change and biodiversity loss, we are also losing [319 acres of farmland daily](#). Given growth forecasts and the pace of development approvals in the Greater Golden Horseshoe, steps must be taken to protect the lands and waters that sustain us. The protection of natural and hydrological

systems and farmland must be prioritized. They are finite, irreplaceable and invaluable in terms of community and ecosystem health and resilience. For the sake of current and future generations, we urge you not to proceed with plans to open up and remove 7,400 acres of protected lands from the Greenbelt.

Yours sincerely,

Caroline Schultz
Executive Director
Ontario Nature



Deb Sherk
President
Bert Miller Nature Club



Gregor Beck
Senior Strategist
Birds Canada



Cheryl Lewandowski
Chair
Blue Dot York Region



Carl Michener
President
Blue Mountain Watershed
Trust Foundation



David Laing
President
Brampton Environmental
Alliance



David Browne
Director of Conservation
Science
Canadian Wildlife Federation



Your connection to wildlife
Votre lien avec la faune

Michelle Kanter
Executive Director
Carolinian Canada Coalition



Teresa Ganna Porter
Spokesperson
Climate Action Newmarket
Aurora



Bruce Craig
Chair
Concerned Citizens of King
Township



John McDonnell
Executive Director
CPAWS Ottawa Valley



Paul Berger
Meeting Chair
CUSP - Citizens United for a
Sustainable Planet



Darlene Salter
Co-chair
Eagle Lake Farabout
Peninsula Coalition



Barbara Steinhoff
Executive Director
Earthroots Fund



Laura Bowman
Staff Lawyer
Ecojustice



Paul Mero
Executive Director
EcoSpark



Tim Gray
Executive Director
Environmental Defence
Canada Inc.



environmental
defence

Geoff Kettel
President
Federation of Urban
Neighbourhoods (Ontario)



Michael Mesure
Executive Director
FLAP Canada



Jim Robb
General Manager
Friends of Rouge Watershed



Graham Flint
Chairman
Friends of Rural
Communities and the
Environment (FORCE)



Susan Moore
President
 Friends of Salmon River



Wioletta Walancik
*Administrative and Programs
 Director*
 Friends of Second Marsh



Kim Hacker
Executive Director
 Friends of Wye Marsh



Paul Heaven
Wildlife Biologist
 Glenside Ecological Services
 Limited



Kevin Thomason
Vice-Chair
 Grand River Environmental
 Network



Lorraine Green
Co-chair
 Grand(m)others Act to Save
 the Planet (GASP)



Bill Lamond
President
 Hamilton Naturalists' Club



Sharon Lovett
Co-Chair
 High Park Nature



Richard Heron
President
 Huntsville Nature Club



Christine Roberts
President
 Huron Fringe Field
 Naturalists



**Peter Krats and Shelia
 Fleming**
Co-Presidents
 Ingersoll District Nature
 Club



Eric Davis
President
 Kawartha Field Naturalists



Max Morden
co-chair
Lakeshore Eco-Network



Nancy Vidler
Chair
Lambton Shores Phragmites
Community Group



Mary Martin
President
Lambton Wildlife Inc



Robert Codd
President
Midland-Penetanguishene
Field Naturalists



Valerie Wilkinson
President
Mississippi Valley Field
Naturalists



Kevin McAuslan
President
Mycological Society of
Toronto



Max Hansgen
President
National Farmers Union –
Ontario



Bernie VanDenBelt
President
Nature London



Joyce Sankey
Conservation Director
Niagara Falls Nature Club



Tom Knezevich
Chair
Nith Valley EcoBoosters



James Kamstra
President
North Durham Nature



Jack Gibbons
Chair
North Gwillimbury Forest
Alliance



Lissa Dwyer
Secretary
Oak Ridges Trail Association



Steve Hounsell
Chair
Ontario Biodiversity Council



Jeffrey Skevington
President
Ontario Field Ornithologists



Linda Heron
Chair
Ontario Rivers Alliance



Doug Forder
General Manager
Ontario Streams



Denis Paccagnella
President
Orillia Naturalists' Club



Jakob Mueller
President
Ottawa Field-Naturalists' Club



Brendan Mulroy
President
Owen Sound Field Naturalists



Kenneth Westcar
Secretary/Treasurer
Oxford County Trails Council



Suzanne Crellin
President
Oxford Environmental Action Committee



Bob Highcock
President
Peninsula Field Naturalists



Elizabeth Churcher
Corresponding Secretary
Quinte Field Naturalists



Stephanie Sobek-Swant
Executive Director
rare Charitable Research
Reserve



Elaine Adam
Political Advocacy
Representative
Retired Teachers of Ontario
District 34 York Region



Angus Inksetter
President
Saugeen Nature



Paul Harpley
President
South Lake Simcoe
Naturalists



Mark Cranford
President
South Peel Naturalists' Club



Terry Crabe
President
Stratford Field Naturalists

Peter Beckett
President
Sudbury Naturalists



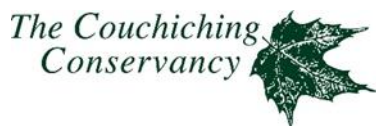
Sony Rai
Director
Sustainable Vaughan

Sustainable Vaughan
Citizens Environmental Coalition

Esther Collier
Founder
Target Climate



Mark Bisset
Executive Director
The Couchiching
Conservancy



Bryan Smith
Chair
The Oxford Coalition for
Social Justice



Otto Peter
President
Thickson's Woods Land
Trust



Sarah Buchanan
Campaigns Director
 Toronto Environmental
 Alliance



Zunaid Khan
President
 Toronto Field Naturalists



Amelia Rose Khan
Volunteer
 Toronto350



Michael Farlow
President
 Transition to Less Waste



Katie Krelove
Ontario Campaigner
 Wilderness Committee



Janet Sumner
Executive Director
 Wildlands League



Frank Godfrey
President
 Willow Beach Field
 Naturalists



Gloria Marsh
Executive Director
 York Region Environmental
 Alliance

