
Subject: Proposed Amendments to the Greenbelt Plan Boundary

Report to: Regional Council

Report date: Thursday, December 1, 2022

Recommendations

1. That Report 27-2022 and its appendices **BE ENDORSED** and that staff **BE DIRECTED** to provide PDS 27-2022 as the Niagara Region's submission to the Province of Ontario through the Environmental Registry of Ontario (ERO 019-6216 and ERO 019-6217).
2. That Report PDS 27-2022 and its appendices **BE CIRCULATED** to the Town of Grimsby and Town of Lincoln.

Key Facts

- The purpose of this report is to respond to the Province's Environmental Registry of Ontario (ERO) posting of proposed amendments to the Greenbelt Plan boundary which in part impacts two sites in the Town of Grimsby.
- Staff recognize the importance of protecting the agricultural system and the importance of agriculture to the economy of Niagara. The Province's proposal to remove 3,000 hectares of Greenbelt protected agriculturally viable lands across Ontario is concerning.
- The Province is proposing to remove approximately 30 hectares of land from within the Greenbelt Area on Main Street West in Grimsby, as well as re-designate approximately five hectares of Greenbelt Area lands at 502 Winston Road in Grimsby for residential redevelopment.
- Regional Council has previously endorsed submissions to the Province seeking correction of Greenbelt mapping errors and recognition of existing non-agricultural development. The two Grimsby sites proposed in this ERO posting are consistent with previously requested mapping corrections.
- Based on existing non-agricultural uses and the previous evaluation of the lands, staff do not object to the changes proposed for the two sites in Grimsby. However,

process and timing concerns related to bringing the sites on-line in light of the Province's proposed development timelines and required Provincial Plan process are noted.

- Staff have identified two additional sites for discussion with the Province (see Appendix 1). These additional sites are related to GO Transit initiatives in Grimsby as well as recognition of existing development within the approved Prudhommes Secondary Plan area in the Town of Lincoln.
- The Province is consulting on the proposed changes via a 30 day commenting period on the ERO. Comments are due December 4, 2022.

Financial Considerations

There are no direct financial implications associated with this report.

Analysis

Background

The Greenbelt Plan was first introduced through Provincial legislation in 2004. In Niagara, the Greenbelt Plan primarily introduced protections for the Niagara Peninsula Tender Fruit and Grape Area (Specialty Crop Area) in north Niagara.

Through the Province's 2015 Coordinated Plan Review and the 10-year review of the Greenbelt Plan, the Region and the local municipalities identified approximately 1,400 hectares (3,459 acres) of additional lands for Greenbelt Plan protection. When the 2017 Greenbelt Plan was approved, these lands were added to the Greenbelt's Protected Countryside designation. Through the work undertaken to develop the recently approved 2022 Niagara Official Plan, these 1,400 hectares of Protected Countryside lands as well as an additional 20 hectares of Specialty Crop Area lands were incorporated into the Region's agricultural land base.

Along with the identification of additional lands for protection, the Region also identified and requested the correction of several historic Greenbelt mapping errors. These were first raised to the Province in September of 2013 through report ICP 84-2013 with additional submissions made through PDS 22-2015 in May of 2015, and PDS 31-2015 in July of 2015. Report PDS 31-2015, included locally endorsed Council submissions seeking mapping corrections.

Some of these submissions, including a submission by the Town of Grimsby, provided significant justification to correct mapping errors. This included areas such as the sites proposed for redesignation by the Province located on Winston Road, as well as the lands along Main Street West, including the site of the future GO Transit Station and parking area.

Further to this, submissions relevant to the Town of Lincoln, focused on recognizing long standing non-agricultural uses such as the Beacon Hotel site (built in the late 1960's) and located in a Specialty Crop Area designation. Although the Beacon and surrounding developed properties (Avondale, Moyer Diebel, etc) are captured under the Town of Lincoln's Prudhommes Secondary Plan, due to inclusion in the Greenbelt Plan Specialty Crop Area designation, re-development of these lands can not be realized.

Current 2022 ERO Posting

In support of the More Homes Built Faster Act, 2022, the Province has posted two Greenbelt proposals on the ERO for comment (both due December 4, 2022).

- ERO Number 019-6216 - Proposed Amendments to the Greenbelt Plan.
- ERO Number 019-6217 - Proposed Amendments to the Greenbelt Area Boundary Regulation.

The reason for the dual posting is to capture that the changes proposed impact both the Greenbelt Plan (2017) as well as the Greenbelt Act (Statute of Ontario, 2004), which is the legislation the Greenbelt Plan is approved under. Both postings are premised around the same objective.

The Province states: "To accommodate that growth and support the building of more homes, our government is proposing to remove or redesignate 15 areas of land totaling approximately 7,400 acres from the edge of the Greenbelt Area that are serviced or adjacent to services and will be used to build housing in the near term."¹

Overall, Staff recognize the importance of protecting the agricultural system and the importance of agriculture to the economy of Niagara and are supportive of the Greenbelt Plan. The Province's proposal to remove 3,000 hectares of Greenbelt protected agriculturally viable lands is concerning.

¹ <https://ero.ontario.ca/notice/019-6216>

Within Niagara Region, the proposal impacts two areas within the Town of Grimsby (see Appendix 2). The first area is a 30 hectare block of Greenbelt Plan designated land on Main Street West in Grimsby. This site:

- contains a mix of existing residential development (approximately 90 municipally serviced homes) that pre-date the Greenbelt Plan.
- based on the historical pattern of residential development, this area is compromised for agricultural use.
- was previously identified to the Province by the Town of Grimsby and the Region for redesignation based on the above noted existing uses.

Based on the above noted points, and previous local and Regional submissions, staff do not object with the Province's proposed removal of this 30 hectare block of land.

The second area is approximately five hectares of Greenbelt land on Winston Road in Grimsby. Through the ERO proposal, the Province seeks to use its authority to redesignate this site as Greenbelt Towns/Villages, adding the site to the urban area of Grimsby. This site:

- is the former place of worship retreat known as the St. Vladimir Cathedral "Golden Gate Park".
- was previously identified to the Province by the Town of Grimsby and the Region for redesignation based on the above noted existing uses.

Based on the above noted points, and previous local and Regional submissions staff do not object to the Province's proposed redesignation of this five hectare block of land from Specialty Crop Area to Greenbelt Towns/Villages.

The Province has indicated that landowners of these areas will be expected to develop plans and build houses quickly and that significant progress on approvals and implementation be achieved by the end of 2023 and construction must be underway by 2025, or the lands would be returned to the Greenbelt. However, if the lands are simply removed from the Greenbelt and not added to the Settlement Area of Grimsby, further planning approvals would be required before the lands could be redeveloped. It should be noted that the Town of Grimsby has expressed concerns over the Province's expectations related to timing and process for the realization of the redevelopment of both sites.

Additional Sites for Discussion

The ERO submission also includes two additional sites (see Appendix 1: Schedules 1 and 2) identified by Regional staff for discussion with the Province. These include:

GO Station Lands on Casablanca Boulevard (Grimsby)

- This eight hectare area is included in the GO Transit Station Secondary Plan, and currently zoned for GO Transit related development.
- The parcels on the north side of the future GO Transit are narrow, constrained by the South Service Road, utility easements, and Ministry of Transportation setbacks.
- Considering the constraints on the north side of the GO Station in Grimsby, staff recommend a discussion with the Province regarding the Greenbelt designation and how this site can facilitate and support the deliver of a Transit Oriented Community.
- The challenge with the area is competing Provincial objectives. The Province calls for the development of a Transit Oriented Community around the GO Station to support the development of the station. The Greenbelt Plan allows for the lands to be utilized for GO related infrastructure including parking areas however, it also requires protection of the land for agriculture. These competing objectives should be further explored with the Province.

East Prudhommes Secondary Plan Area (Lincoln)

- This nine hectare area is included in the Prudhommes Secondary Plan area and is located between Lake Ontario and the North Service Road in Vineland.
- The lands are currently developed with non-agricultural uses (restaurant, hotel, distribution warehouse and an industrial manufacturing facility).
- The lands are on full municipal services, are adjacent to a serviced urban area and zoned for non-agricultural uses.
- The entirety of the Prudhommes Secondary Plan area supports the development of a complete community.

The sites identified in the Province's ERO proposal for removal in Niagara are not considered viable agricultural lands. They are fragmented parcels with long standing non-agricultural uses that pre-date the original 2005 Greenbelt Plan. The inclusion of hotels, fully serviced subdivisions, industrial manufacturing facilities and major transit stations in the Specialty Crop Area undermines the vision and goals of the Greenbelt Plan and its protections.

Conclusion

Protecting the agricultural land base is foundational to the continued success of the Region's agricultural sector and the Region re-iterates its overall support of the Greenbelt Plan. Through the Provincial Coordinated Plan Review and the Region's 2022 Official Plan, 1,400 hectares of new Greenbelt Protected Countryside lands, 20 hectares of Specialty Crop Area, and 3,300 hectares of Prime Agricultural Area were identified and added to the agricultural land base for the Region.

With respect to the Greenbelt Plan ERO posting and in the Niagara context, staff do not object to proposed changes related to the two sites in Grimsby located on Main Street West and 502 Winston Road. The areas are fragmented with long standing non-agricultural uses that pre-date the original 2005 Greenbelt Plan. Further, staff recommend discussions with the Province regarding two additional sites, lands south of the future Grimsby GO Station and lands within the Prudhommes Secondary Plan (Beacon) to recognize challenges associated with achieving a Transit Oriented Community and existing historical uses.

Alternatives Reviewed

Council could chose not to endorse and submit comments to the ERO.

Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities

This report supports all of Council's 2018-2022 Strategic Priorities which include:

- Supporting Businesses and Economic Growth;
- Healthy and Vibrant Community;
- Responsible Growth and Infrastructure Planning; and
- Sustainable and Engaging Government.

Other Pertinent Reports

- ICP 84-2013 – Niagara Perspectives: Greenbelt Plan Review
- PDS 22-2015 - Coordinated Policy Review Comment Submission
- PDS 31-2015 - Province of Ontario Coordinated Policy Review Mapping Submission
- PDS 29-2016 - Province of Ontario Coordinated Plan Review Submission on the Draft Plans
- PDS 41-2016 - Proposed Revisions

- CWCD 444-2017 - Growing the Greenbelt
- PDS 18-2021 - Growing the Greenbelt Environmental Registry of Ontario Posting

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Appendices

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| Appendix 2 | ERO Proposed Changes (Map 11) | Page 11 |