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The Regional Municipality of Durham Report

To: Regional Council
From: Commissioner of Planning and Economic Development
Report: #2023-P-23
Date: September 27, 2023

Subject:

Durham Region's response to Environmental Registry of Ontario Postings [#019-7561](#) and [#019-7562](#) related to an Amendment to the Greenbelt Area boundary regulation ([O. Reg. 59/05](#)) in the Town of Ajax

Recommendations:

That Regional Council:

- A) Advise the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing that Durham Region Council supports returning the properties at 765 and 775 Kingston Road East in the Town of Ajax to the Greenbelt Area; and
 - B) That a copy of this report be sent to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, the MPPs in Durham and the area municipalities.
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Report:

1. Background and Purpose

- 1.1 On September 5, 2023, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing advised that it was seeking feedback on a proposal to return lands to the Greenbelt located at 765 and 775 Kingston Road East in the Town of Ajax, through the Environmental Registry of Ontario (ERO) postings #019-7561 and #019-7562 (Attachment #1). The deadline for comments is October 20, 2023; hence the need for this report to be presented straight to Council.

- 1.2 The subject lands are 54 hectares (133 acres) in size and are located in the northwest quadrant of Highway 401 and Lake Ridge Road. They have been part of the Greenbelt Plan Area since it was created in 2005. They were removed from the Greenbelt on December 15, 2022 together with 14 other parcels across the Greater Toronto Area totalling approximately 3,000 hectares (7,400 acres) as part of the provincial government's initiative to build 1.5 million homes by 2031.
- 1.3 In Durham Region, the Greenbelt removals included approximately 1,820 hectares (4,500 acres) of land in three locations:
- In the City of Pickering – lands located south of Highway 407, west of West Duffins Creek and north of the CP Belleville rail line, and east of York-Durham Line, known as the Duffins Rouge Agricultural Preserve (1,736 ha/4,289 ac);
 - In the Municipality of Clarington – lands located at the northeast corner of Nash Road and Hancock Road, west of Highway 418 (35 ha/86 ac); and
 - In the Town of Ajax – lands located on the south side of Kingston Road East, north of Highway 401 and west of Lake Ridge Road, at 765 and 775 Kingston Road East (54 ha/133 ac).
- 1.4 On December 14, 2022, Regional Council considered Report 2022-COW-31 which outlined the government's plan to remove lands from the Greenbelt. Attached to Report #2022-COW-31 was a letter from the Chief Administrative Officer to the Minister of Municipal Affairs dated December 1, 2022, expressing a variety of concerns with the proposed Greenbelt removals, (e.g. servicing, timing, financing, environmental). The main recommendation of the COW-31 report was that the CAO's letter be endorsed as the Region's formal comments on the proposed Greenbelt removals. At the December 14th meeting, Regional Council further amended the staff recommendation by adding two new clauses which call on the province to return environmental and Greenbelt protections to all of the areas being removed.
- 1.5 The CAO's December 1st letter acknowledged the need for more housing to be built but recommended that the province focus on collaborating with all affected parties, including the development community, upper and lower tier municipalities, to redouble efforts on accelerating units already within the planning process, rather than redirecting attention by removing areas of the Greenbelt that have not been contemplated to accommodate growth.

2. Previous Reports and Decisions

- 2.1 On November 10, 2022, Report [#2022-INFO-92](#) was released to advise outgoing and incoming Council of the proposed changes to the Greenbelt Plan.
- 2.2 On December 14, 2022, Report [#2022-COW-31](#) provided Durham Region's response to the provincial consultation on Proposed Amendments to the Greenbelt Plan.
- 2.3 On December 19, 2022, Council Memorandum [CC 122](#) advised Council that the province had published O.Reg. 567/22 providing notice that a change to the Greenbelt Act was being enacted related to the Protected Countryside Removals and the 2022 Urban River valley additions.
- 2.4 On December 21, 2022, Regional Council endorsed Report 2022-COW-31 and further modified the staff recommendations as noted in the final [Council resolution](#).

3. Greenbelt Removals

- 3.1 Durham is planning for and experiencing significant population and employment growth. Envision Durham, the Region's new Official Plan, was adopted by Regional Council on May 17, 2023, and is currently awaiting approval by the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. The new Regional Official Plan will more than accommodate the Region's forecast population of 1.3 million people and 460,000 jobs by 2051. These forecasts represent a near doubling of the Region's historic growth rate.
- 3.2 As part of Envision Durham, new settlement area boundary expansions include over 3,700 ha (9,100 acres) of land primarily within the "whitebelt" (the land between the existing urban area and the Greenbelt). New housing supply for the coming decades can be accommodated through settlement area boundary expansions, within intensification areas, employment area conversions and within new transit-oriented communities. In staff's view, no need has been demonstrated to further expand into the Greenbelt to account for the province's housing targets. Provincial forecasts and area municipal growth targets as they apply to Durham have been accommodated through Council's adoption of Envision Durham. In the past year or so, other Regions within the Greater Golden Horseshoe have similarly adopted new official plans to accommodate their growth forecasts to 2051 with corresponding urban boundary expansions.

- 3.3 The following is an excerpt from the ERO posting that explains why the government is considering returning the lands in Ajax to the Greenbelt as this time:

“The government was clear that owners of the lands removed from the Greenbelt would be expected to develop detailed plans to build housing and move forward with the project quickly. It is the government’s expectation that significant progress on approvals and implementation be achieved by the end of 2023.

It has come to the government’s attention that the discussions surrounding the development of the lands removed from the Greenbelt located at 765 and 775 Kingston Road East in the Town of Ajax were at an early stage, and that a 104-acre parcel within the lands was recently listed for sale.”

4. Relationship to Strategic Plan

- 4.1 This report aligns with/addresses the following strategic goals and priorities in the Durham Region Strategic Plan:

Goal 1 Environmental Sustainability

Goal 2 Community Vitality

5. Conclusion

- 5.1 Returning the lands in the Town of Ajax to the Greenbelt Area is consistent with Durham Regional Council's December 21, 2022, position that the province return environmental and Greenbelt protections to all of the areas being removed. Accordingly, the recommendations associated with this report reaffirms Regional Council’s position as it applies to the subject lands within the Town of Ajax.
- 5.2 Regional staff will keep Council apprised of the outcome of this consultation, as well as any future progress on Greenbelt removals.

6. Attachment

Attachment #1: Letter from the Hon. Paul Calandra, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing (September 5, 2023)

Respectfully submitted,

Original signed by

Brian Bridgeman, MCIP, RPP, PLE
Commissioner of Planning and Economic
Development

Recommended for Presentation to Council

Original signed by

Elaine C. Baxter-Trahair
Chief Administrative Officer

**Ministry of
Municipal Affairs
and Housing**

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234-2023-4434

September 6, 2023

Dear Clerks, CAOs, and Conservation Authority Administrators:

Re: Proposal to return lands in Ajax to the Greenbelt

In December 2022, to accommodate Ontario's unprecedented growth by supporting the building of more homes, our government removed or redesignated 15 areas of land totaling approximately 7,400 acres from the edge of the Greenbelt Area. At the same time, a portion of the Paris Galt Moraine was added to the Greenbelt, along with 13 Urban River Valleys, totalling 9,400 acres, for an overall expansion of approximately 2000 acres.

The government was clear that owners of the lands removed from the Greenbelt would be expected to develop detailed plans to build housing with landowners also being responsible for paying for the full cost of housing-enabling and community-building infrastructure. It is the government's expectation that significant progress on approvals and implementation be achieved by the end of 2023.

It has come to the government's attention that the discussions surrounding the development of the lands removed from the Greenbelt located at 765 and 775 Kingston Road East in the Town of Ajax were at an early stage, and that a 104-acre parcel within the lands was recently listed for sale. These actions run counter to the government's objective of building homes quickly. The government is now seeking feedback on a proposal to return these lands, amounting to approximately 133 acres, to the Greenbelt Area through an amendment to the Greenbelt Area boundary regulation ([O. Reg. 59/05](#)) and an amendment to the Greenbelt Plan.

Further information on the proposal to amend the Greenbelt Plan and Greenbelt Area boundary regulation, can be found at:

- [ERO #019-7561 – Proposal to return lands to the Greenbelt \(Amendment to the Greenbelt Plan\)](#)
- [ERO #019-7562 – Proposal to return lands to the Greenbelt \(Amendment to Greenbelt Boundary Regulation O. Reg. 59/05\)](#)

Information and mapping on the 2022 decision to amend the Greenbelt Plan can be found here:

- [ERO #019-6216 - Amendments to the Greenbelt Plan](#)
- [Greenbelt Maps](#)

The comment period on the Environmental Registry of Ontario is open for 45 days and will close on October 20, 2023. I look forward to receiving your input on this proposal.

In the meantime, my ministry is working to prepare a review of the Greenbelt to ensure that it is appropriately accommodating Ontario's significant growth, as is mandated in provincial legislation. This review will be informed by the recommendations of the Auditor General's report

and will include an evaluation of the remaining properties that were removed from the Greenbelt late last year.

As ministry officials design and launch this review, the non-partisan Provincial Land and Development Facilitator will continue to work with proponents of the remaining sites to ensure that progress on these lands continues, including the obligation to provide community benefits such as parks, community centres, schools and hospitals. This work will be an important input into the mandated review into the Greenbelt, as will meaningful consultation with municipalities, Indigenous communities and regular people living in these areas who deal with the negative impacts of the housing supply crisis the most. The properties that were removed from the Greenbelt will have to stand on their own merits: If the review finds these properties cannot support the government's objective of building homes quickly, they will be returned to the Greenbelt.

We have been clear that progress on these sites must meet the government's expectations. If planning and approvals have not significantly progressed by the end of this year and if shovels are not in the ground by 2025, the government will return these lands to the Greenbelt.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Paul Calandra', with a stylized flourish at the end.

The Hon. Paul Calandra

Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing

- c. Martha Greenberg, Deputy Minister, Municipal Affairs and Housing
Sean Fraser, Assistant Deputy Minister, Municipal Affairs and Housing,
Planning and Growth Division