



# **YORK REGION**

## **FEDERATION OF AGRICULTURE**

**SERVING THE FARM COMMUNITY SINCE 1940**

October 21, 2020

York Region Council  
Attention: Regional Clerk

Re: Regional Council Meeting, October 22, 2020 Item G.1 (October 8, Committee of the Whole Agenda Item H.2.2. – Potential for Employment Lands Along 400 Series Highways)

To – Regional Chair, Mayors and Regional Councillors

The York Region Federation of Agriculture would like to provide comments in opposition to the above noted request to the Province on behalf of its 653 Registered Farm Business members in York Region. York Region's agriculture and agri-food sector contribute \$2.7 Billion in annual GDP and 57,000 jobs in York Region. Our farms need agricultural land to produce the food for our ever growing population. The higher the projected population, the more important it is to preserve agricultural land to feed that population.

The lands identified for potential conversion to employment land are mostly prime agricultural areas and Natural Heritage areas. They have been protected by the Greenbelt and Oak Ridges Moraine Plans for over 15 years. These two plans identified where urbanization should not occur in order to provide permanent protection to the agricultural land base and protect the ecological and hydrological integrity of the features, area and functions.

The implementation of these two plans, in conjunction with the provisions of The Growth Plan, serve to protect and provide for growth within urban boundaries while the implementation of policies for lands outside of such boundaries serve to protect for Natural Heritage areas and agricultural areas. Intensification of residential development areas along with the protection of employment areas within urban areas serves to ensure that we 'live within our means' so to speak. Provincial policies provide for and encourage intensification of residential development through such means as higher density housing. Development within existing employment land areas should be done at a higher density such that such lands would be developed at a higher foot print. This would result in protection of agricultural land outside of designated urban areas.

While the staff report did not indicate the exact amount of land that would be converted to employment land, Attachment 1 to such staff report indicates the expansion of employment lands and the resulting loss of thousands of acres of agricultural land.

Taking land out of the Greenbelt now will set a precedence for future changes within the Greenbelt area and limit the potential for agriculture in its contribution to our economy. The Greenbelt has created a form of security in the future availability of agricultural land in York Region allowing for development and

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innovation in agricultural practices and new technology. We are living in a time where innovation and green initiatives are needed as an economic driver in this country and region. Agriculture is positioned to be a significant contributor in this as we look beyond food and into production of fuel and fiber from the renewable resources that are produced via agriculture. Things such as bioplastics made from agricultural byproducts are set to become the new normal as we shift away from petroleum products. Why not promote innovation within our current “employment lands”, more importantly our agricultural lands rather than fracturing an established system of protecting those lands?

A key component to be addressed as part of the Municipal Comprehensive Review is the protection of Agricultural Lands. This would represent the implementation of the Agricultural System approach which would include: active planning for agriculture economic development; improved viability of agriculture and growth of the agri-food sector; better protection of the agricultural land base; increased consistency and certainty across municipalities; reinforcement of the synergies between agriculture, natural heritage and water systems; and collaboration between the province, municipalities, farmers and businesses with a common interest in a strong agri-food sector. Expansion of employment lands, as contemplated in the draft documents/mapping, would result in further fragmentation of agriculture lands which have been protected within and through the policies of the Greenbelt Plan. Such employment land expansion goes completely against provisions for and policies in place to ensure the protection the agricultural system. .

The Province and the Region have done considerable work over the past years to identify agricultural lands and to ensure their protection and continued use for agricultural purposes. The employment area expansion being contemplated now goes against such detailed work. The York Region Federation of Agriculture urges Regional Council to ensure the continued protection of our valuable agricultural land base through opposition to expanding employment lands outside of existing urban areas.

Sincerely

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