

October 21, 2020

York Region Council  
Regional Corporate Services Department  
Administrative Centre  
17250 Yonge Street, 4th Floor  
Newmarket, Ontario  
L3Y 6Z1  
Via email, [regional.clerk@york.ca](mailto:regional.clerk@york.ca)

Re: COW Report, October 8, 2020, H2.2.

We the undersigned urge York Region Council not to open up the Greenbelt for development.

Today, York Region Council is making a request to the province to open up the Oak Ridges Moraine and Greenbelt to development. We know that just after the Committee vote on October 8, 2020 the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Steve Clark, said no. Thankfully, these conservation plans are provincial plans created to limit municipal sprawl on farmland, protect source water and support development within existing urban areas to make growth more efficient and affordable. The Region can only ask the province. And this time the province said no to development in the Greenbelt.

But the province doesn't have a good track record on the Greenbelt either as they are fast-tracking two highways through the Greenbelt and had to back down on legislation that would have opened up the Greenbelt to development.

Employment areas in the Greenbelt along highway 400 and 404 are not needed. In the Greater Toronto Area our employment land needs are changing. Today, more jobs are located in urban areas than ever before. In the past five years 50% of employment growth within York Region occurred in existing built space. And we can expect this trend to continue as more people work from home or use technology to work from coffee shops or other non-traditional workspace. The result of these changes is a reduced need for traditional employment spaces.

Concentrating economic growth within our cities and existing economic zones creates innovation hubs that spur the knowledge economy. Locating employment lands within our towns and cities also addresses the most significant threat to human existence, climate change. By encouraging more people to walk, take transit or cycle to work rather than drive, gridlock and greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs) are reduced.

### **Extending Great Lakes-based sewer systems into the Greenbelt**

It is vital that future development needs are calculated prior to considering any expansion of servicing. York Region planning staff are conducting analyses to

determine where our future population will live and work up to 2041. A 2016 York Region Housing Supply report indicated that the region had a 21- to 23-year supply of land designated for housing and further that servicing has already been allocated for 91% of approved housing. Is extending the big pipe the most sustainable way to service growth?

In York Region, like in most of the GTHA, the population growth rate is slowing, growing older and our households are getting smaller. We need a better mix of small housing options for low income seniors and young people. In the past when the big pipe was extended large, expensive low-density homes were built. Sprawl increases debt, taxes, and slows commuter traffic at a time when we are trying to reduce traffic related greenhouse gases. Further, extending the big pipe into the Greenbelt suggests to developers the Greenbelt is open for development, increasing the speculative land value of Greenbelt land and making it harder for farmers to keep farming.

We encourage the Region of York and the province to stop moving forward with plans to open up the Greenbelt for highways and pipes to fuel sprawl and instead focus on building the affordable housing we need in age-friendly, transit supportive communities.

Sincerely,

Debbe Crandall and Graham Whitelaw, PhD  
**Save the Oak Ridges Moraine Coalition**

Gloria Marsh, Executive Director  
**York Region Environmental Alliance**  
<http://www.yrea.org>

Sony Rai, Executive Director  
**Sustainable Vaughan**

Bruce Craig, Chair, CCKT  
Jennifer Anstey, Vice-Chair, CCKT  
**Concerned Citizens of King Township**

cc. Minister Steve Clark  
York Region.com

## **Background**

The Oak Ridges Moraine legislation was created by the province in 2000 following widespread citizen action protesting against sprawling municipal development that bulldozed forests, farms and threatened groundwater sources. The moraine is called the "rain barrel of southern Ontario" because it provides drinking water for over 250,000 people, the source of over 80 rivers and streams and home to the Happy Valley Forest. The employment lands along highway 400 threaten to cut into one of the Oak Ridges Moraine's largest Natural Core Areas and Area of Natural and Scientific Interest known as the Happy Valley Forest.

The Greenbelt is one of Ontario's most popular policies with over 90% of people supporting it.

York Region is currently reviewing its future growth needs and instead opening up the Greenbelt to employment land, it must allocate the majority of jobs to urban centres and the three employment zones where the infrastructure needed for job growth already exists.

There is no shortage of land for economic development as evidenced by:

1. Municipalities are requesting conversion of existing employment lands to residential uses.
2. A 2017 York Region report identified 2,588 ha of vacant employment lands. As the average annual uptake of employment land is between 7 and 19 hectares there is no shortage of employment lands for the next generation.
3. Region of York employment forecast indicates the existing employment areas can expand to accommodate jobs to meet the forecasted demand.