

# DEPUTATION REQUEST

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

OCTOBER 8, 2020

**Subject:** Taking Lands out of the Greenbelt

**Spokesperson:** Claire Malcolmson

**Name of Group or person(s) being represented (if applicable):**

Rescue Lake Simcoe Coalition

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**Brief summary of issue or purpose of deputation:**

To express concern about the precedent of taking lands out of the Greenbelt for employment uses. To highlight impacts to Lake Simcoe.

OFFICE OF THE REGIONAL CLERK

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October 8, 2020

Re. Council Agenda item H.2.2. Potential For Employment Lands Along 400 Series Highways

I am writing to express our organization's concern about York Region taking lands out of the Greenbelt for employment uses.

Two of the three areas proposed for being removed from the Greenbelt are in the Lake Simcoe watershed, and the area on Highway 400 between King and Vaughan contains areas of high quality natural cover. It is inappropriate to take out natural areas that should be protected through the Lake Simcoe Protection Plan, just when its legislative review is about to begin.

What is needed instead in the Lake Simcoe watershed is the protection of areas of high quality natural cover. Specifically, the area on the 400 between King and Vaughan does contain some areas defined as high quality natural cover (HQNC), mapped by the province here:

[https://rescuelakesimcoe.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/HighQualityNaturalCover\\_Final.pdf](https://rescuelakesimcoe.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/HighQualityNaturalCover_Final.pdf)

The Lake Simcoe Protection Plan contains a target of 40% HQNC in the watershed. We now have 28% HQNC but only half of that is well protected by provincial policies. Please do not remove the rare and increasingly important natural areas to make way for employment uses that we do not think are needed or rational. See our video for more information:

<https://rescuelakesimcoe.org/about-us/accomplishments/lake-simcoe-greenlands-project/>

Converting natural areas to hardened surfaces does not come without costs. Salt levels in Lake Simcoe and its tributaries are growing alarmingly, and parking lots are largely to blame.

Further, in a time of great economic and employment upheaval, it is risky to put York Region taxpayers on the line for servicing new employment areas when there is no clear demand. We have seen a real race to the bottom in Simcoe County where two strategic employment lands on the 400 were approved with MZO's, and half of those have languished due to the high cost of servicing. If there were such intense demand for the types of employment lands you wish to create, why would 10 years have passed with nothing new built at the Innisfil Heights employment area? We are sceptical that "if we build it, they will come" is an approach based on reasonable assumptions.

Finally, York Region would be asking the province to change Greenbelt legislation. We do not want this at all. A full review of the Greenbelt Plan was conducted in 2017 and it was determined that there was no compelling need to change the boundaries. Given the uncertainty of these times, and the evidence below that no more employment lands are needed, York Region's request would disproportionately help land owners, speculators and developers.

There is already more than enough land designated for employment in York Region: A York Region [report](#) in May 2019 (slide 1) indicates that almost 2,600 hectares of employment land were vacant as of 2017. The March, 2018 [York Region 2017 Vacant Employment Land Inventory](#) confirms this number (p. 14), noting as well that “33 per cent of York Region employment lands are vacant” (p. 5) and “The supply of vacant employment lands remains healthy and needs to be protected (p. 4). The report does not mention extending into the Greenbelt.

The same reports identifies that “employment land absorption in recent years has been lower than the historical average” (p. 6), with “approximately 283 net hectares of vacant employment lands...absorbed in York Region between 2013 and 2017, representing an average annual absorption rate of 71 net hectares” (p. 4). Moreover, 108 hectares were converted to non-employment uses over the same period (p. 6).

The same report also highlights that much of the existing designated employment lands are ready to be developed (pp. 4-5):

- 41 per cent of vacant employment lands contain an active plan of subdivision or site plan.
- 47 per cent or 1,228 net hectares of the total vacant supply have full regional and local servicing infrastructure in place to support development. However, half of these lands (616 of 1,228 net ha) require additional servicing capacity to support full buildout.
- A further 39 per cent (1,003 net ha) of the vacant inventory have regional servicing infrastructure in place but require extension of local systems. 59 per cent (596 of 1,003 net ha) require additional servicing capacity to support full buildout.
- Approximately 22 per cent of vacant employment parcels, amounting to 1,897 net hectares, are greater than 5 hectares.
- Nearly 84 per cent of vacant employment land, amounting to over 2,183 net hectares of land, is within 5 km of a 400-series highway
- 60 per cent of vacant employment parcels amounting to approximately 928 net hectares of vacant employment land are within 500 metres of a transit stop.
- There are approximately 249 net hectares of employment land with intensification potential for additional employment uses.

We urge you to carry on with the good work York Region has done protecting natural features and Lake Simcoe’s health. The proposal in H.2.2. is not a sustainable approach to land use planning and could have serious negative effects for the rest of the Greater Golden Horseshoe.

Sincerely,



Claire Malcolmson, Executive Director

Rescue Lake Simcoe Coalition

*The Rescue Lake Simcoe Coalition is a lake-wide member-based organization, representing 26 groups in the Lake Simcoe watershed, that provides leadership and inspires people to take action to protect Lake Simcoe.*