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York Regional Council  
Committee of the Whole (Electronic Meeting 8 October 2020)

*submitted by email to:  
clerk@york.ca*

## **Potential For Employment Lands Along 400 Series Highways**

“As our world becomes increasingly crowded and urban sprawl threatens to engulf us, greenbelts are seen worldwide as one way of ensuring that critical green space, natural wilderness areas and farmland are preserved. Ontario’s Greenbelt accomplishes all this. In addition, Ontario’s decision to protect the rivers flowing into Lake Ontario should help to ensure that the province has good quality drinking water.”

~ Aug. 2016, Dan McDermott, Sierra Club Canada

I read York Region’s request to the Province to “shrink” regional Greenbelt lands with a rising Kafkaesque sense of alarm. Why do I choose the descriptor, Kafkaesque? For those on council unfamiliar with this term, the Czech-born author, Franz Kafka, wrote about situations where individual citizens were ignored by over-bearing monocentric authorities who wielded power with impunity. Kafka’s name became associated with “bizarre and impersonal administrative situations where the individual feels powerless to understand or control what is happening.”

Throughout this entire document, regarding Potential for Employment Lands Along 400 Series Highways, York Region seems confused. It talks about protecting the landscape, understands the need for setting aside natural areas, realizes the value of pollinators ... on and on ... BUT, it wants the province to permit removal of lands from the Greenbelt for more of exactly the same type of unimaginative landscape conversions that have already resulted in cheek-by-jowl development, more roads, more pavement, far more warehouses, more pollution, more congestion, etc.

Incredibly, York Region politicians appear to be basing their reduction plan for the Greenbelt on background data from 2004, which shows how The Planning and Economic Development Committee was swayed by communications and a deputation, presented between December 1 to December 6, 2004, by lawyers and planners who represented the private interests of developers: some named; others identified only as numbered companies. No mention of the public interest! That was SIXTEEN YEARS ago. Please pull your heads out of 2004, and pay attention to 2020.

It is long past time to cut the umbilicus between politicians and developers in Ontario. They have benefitted hugely by collecting full profits from their developments, while the public is forced over and over to support roughly 20% to 40% of development through overt charges (not including subsidies from other levels of government) for all this unnecessary “future growth”. We know there is already enough land in the GTA to provide for future development, should it eventuate in an orderly, not FORCED, fashion.

Developers have been lavished with far too much favourable attention in terms of exemptions from provisions of Official Plans, while using their money to influence provincial politicians (think Bill 66, Bill 197, sudden flurry of iron-clad, appeal-proof Ministerial Zoning Orders which silence public input, and now this appeal by York Region), while fighting opposition from any resident groups. How is the public interest served?

While York Region and its municipalities are predicting growth forever, even as far out as 2051 and beyond, they overlook a key detail: the land base for this region has not changed in size at all. These plans only aim for further congestion of this finite landscape and accelerated deterioration of remaining finite natural areas and farmlands. Natural areas mitigate flooding, provide recreational opportunities and habitat for beleaguered native species, while also providing life-giving oxygen and other supportive ecological functions. Expanding zones for more pavement, asphalt, bricks, and cement raise the temperature of an area, creating a “heat island”, and we already have too many of those.

Let’s be very clear that all levels of government within York Region have gone WAY OVER the heads of citizens with this request. With so many politicians at so many levels, it is imperative that residents be informed and consulted on York Region’s unseemly “push” to UNDO **the Greenbelt which, according to a 2013 public poll, has the enthusiastic support of 90% of Ontarians**. While the circled red areas on York Region’s map appear limited, it would take developers no time at all to be lavished with permits for infill developments, which have increased since the 1980s in Ontario.

This document raises a key issue under Item 6 where it states:

“The competitive benefits of new employment lands adjacent to 400 series highways may benefit a local municipality, but the associated cost of municipal infrastructure required to service these new lands, and the loss of Greenbelt Plan lands still needs to be carefully evaluated and considered.”

Consider the above statement in juxtaposition to the observation on p.5 of York Region’s own staff report, which states: “24 per cent of the Region’s labour force being at risk of automation, with an economy increasingly focused on higher skilled activities”, although it adds “the impacts are anticipated to be gradual, with automation likely to create more jobs in the long run.” This sounds like wishful thinking. Now, let’s look at what Deloitte Canada foresees.

According to the Canadian edition of Deloitte's 2015 Global Human Capital Trends report, 47% of the Canadian business and HR leaders surveyed said they plan to increase the use of contingent, outsourced or contract workers in the next three to five years (or by 2020). Several related themes emerged in this human resources' capital report: the need to reinvent human resources to adapt to the needs of a changing work force; **the continuing transition to a "contingent" work force**, meaning temporary, contract, hourly and outsourced workers. These sporadic workers are even referred to as 'off balance sheet' since their presence is no longer a required domestic input item.

Many issues regarding the future of work were outlined again in this 2017 Deloitte report at <https://dupress.deloitte.com/dup-us-en/focus/human-capital-trends/2017/future-workforce-changing-nature-of-work.html?id=us:2el:3dc:dup3826:awa:cons:hct17> It concentrates on the augmented workforce where artificial intelligence, robotics and cognitive computing intersect with 'contingent labour'. One of the questions in this report asks **"How can we crowdsource activities—and use contingent, freelance, and gig economy talent—to save time and money, increase quality, and improve operational flexibility and scalability?"** In other words, how can human labour be minimized?

Job reductions will also be accompanied by "de-skilling" a relatively new word in the dictionary: defined as: *"to remove any need of skill, judgment, or initiative in: jobs being deskilled by automation."* The CBC's business reporter, Don Pittis, described this phenomenon at <http://www.cbc.ca/news/business/jobs-advancer-minimum-wage-deskilling-1.4190903> De-skilling makes it easier to transfer jobs around the globe to the cheapest locations.

There will be fewer jobs for workers in the near future, as was also predicted by the TD Bank's Economic Unit in its 2013 report: Jobs in Canada: For Whom, What and Where?

While regional and municipal councils have made property taxes the cornerstone of their revenues, they are going to have to learn to do with less money in the future. It's time for cost reductions, not more new government offices. Has the Region considered asking the Province to cut its numbers in half as was done to Toronto City Council in 2018? Has the Region considered that this might already be a consideration at Queen's Park? And, now you are actually inviting provincial scrutiny of your plans. Perhaps, the Premier will organize an 'efficiency entourage' to tour all of your offices to assess costs versus benefits as he interprets them.

When it comes to such sweeping changes, we definitely need a politically-binding public referendum on this issue so the public is allowed to have a real say in the process. Not just politicians, and not just developers.

Greenbelt lands already provide employment in the form of farming. This would be a very good time to review the Ontario Federation of Agriculture's 2018 report: **Agriculture Matters – A Guide for Municipal Councillors and Staff** available at <https://ofa.on.ca/resources/guide-for-municipal-councillors-and-staff/>

If, as this document claims, “The York Region economy is worth an estimated **\$60.9-billion** (CBOC, July, 2020), then Regional Council must also note that “Ontario’s agri-food sector is a major economic engine for the province. In terms of job creation and economic growth, a 2018 report confirmed that the agri-food sector **contributes over \$39 billion** to Ontario’s GDP and employs more than 820,000 Ontarians in the supply chain.”

If Ontario would implement a modern agricultural policy, this province would be positioned to attract agricultural and manufacturing investment as a global leader in Ontario’s agri-food industry, in one of the largest agri-food hubs in North America. Even better, this province could feed itself.

And let’s not overlook the statement on p. 5: “Over 2,000 businesses in the Region rely on exporting as their primary source of revenue, collectively generating **\$19 billion** annually.” How many people do those 2,000 businesses employ because we know governments don’t create jobs – they just take credit for the ones that appear, but not the ones that are lost. Once again, let’s not forget the agri-food industry’s **\$39-billion** contribution to Ontario’s annual GDP.

Those who have farmers in their families know that one of the biggest threats to farming comes from sudden planning changes adopted willy-nilly by governments at all levels for the sake of more urban/suburban expansion. Farmers are not consulted about these changes, nor is the public. Global food shortages are already occurring. Only the dull-witted, or those who do not eat, see little value in local food production.

This document indicates York Region pretends to possess the power to predict the growth of industry along its highway corridors, while never ONCE mentioning the current health crisis, known as the Covid-19 pandemic. Did York Region ever predict such a medical emergency in any of its previous growth iterations? I doubt it. Does York Region foresee any future pandemics?

Yet, York Region is greedy for more access to the Great Lakes for water and wastewater, as if those lakes are not already under tremendous stress from too much development on the American and Canadian sides of those shorelines. York Region should seek input from the International Joint Commission on the Great Lakes for an assessment of its anticipated new demands.

I certainly do NOT support York Region in its bid to reduce the size of the Greenbelt. In fact, I would prefer to see it increased in size. Work on that, please.

Regards (and input) from a resident of York Region,



Vicki Hotte