



Office of the Chief Planner  
Corporate Services Department

## MEMORANDUM

To: Regional Chair Emmerson and Members of Regional Council

From: Paul Freeman  
Chief Planner

CC: Dan Kuzmyk  
Regional Solicitor

Date: September 15, 2021

Re: Urban Expansion Requests within the Oak Ridges Moraine Area of the Greenbelt Plan

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### **There continues to be interest expressed to expand urban settlement areas into the Greenbelt Plan area through the Municipal Comprehensive Review**

In the past there has been interest from several York Region local municipalities and through private sector or landowner submissions, requesting urban expansion into Greenbelt and Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan (ORMCP) areas. In response to the Draft Forecast some of these requests have been reiterated. The intent of this memorandum is to provide additional context for the recommended forecast which does not include urban expansion on lands currently protected by the Greenbelt and Oak Ridges Moraine Plans.

### **The Region's Official Plan must conform with Provincial Plans**

The Growth Plan, Greenbelt Plan and Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan work together to direct growth in a manner that protects a strong and connected agricultural system and the ecological integrity of the Greater Golden Horseshoe over the long term. In accordance with policy [2.2.1.2](#) of the Growth Plan, "forecasted growth will be directed to settlement areas that have a delineated built boundary; have existing or planned municipal water and wastewater systems, and can support the achievement of complete communities". Policy [2.2.1.2](#) also

indicates growth will be limited in rural settlements or settlement areas in the Greenbelt Plan Area.

Policy [2.2.8](#) (*Note to reader: this hyperlink requires scrolling down to 2.2.8*) indicates the need for urban expansion must be established through an upper-tier Municipal Comprehensive review and includes policies regarding where and how that growth should be accommodated.

### **Policies of the Greenbelt Plan restrict urban expansion of settlement areas**

Greenbelt Plan 2017 states “The Greenbelt Plan, together with the ORMCP and the Niagara Escarpment Plan (NEP), identify where urbanization should not occur in order to provide permanent protection to the agricultural land base and the ecological and hydrological features, areas and functions occurring on this landscape”.

As outlined in a memorandum to Council in [January 2021](#), opportunities to expand settlement areas within the Greenbelt Plan are limited. Specifically, section [2.2.8](#) (*Note to reader: this hyperlink requires scrolling down to 2.2.8*) of the Growth Plan limit the expansion of settlement areas to 5% of the current land area to a maximum of 10 hectares. A report to Council in [October 2020](#) regarding potential employment along 400 series highways also outlined the Provincial Policy constraints to designating Greenbelt lands for the purposes of permitting employment uses.

### **Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan indicates growth is to be directed to existing settlement areas**

With respect to settlement area expansions, the implementation section of the ORMCP indicates upper-tier municipalities may change or refine the boundaries of settlement areas through an MCR. It should be noted the Implementation section of the Plan is intended to help users understand how to apply the plan but is not policy and does not form part of the Regulation which establishes the Plan.

The policies of the ORMCP ([Section 18](#)) indicate “the purpose of Settlement Areas is to focus and contain urban growth” by “minimizing the encroachment and impact of development on the ecological functions and hydrological features of the Plan Area” and by “promoting the efficient use of land with transit-supportive densities, through intensification and redevelopment within existing urban areas” ([policy 18.1 a and b](#)). The Plan indicates the Countryside Areas “provide an agricultural and rural transition and buffer between the Natural Core and Natural Linkage areas” [Section 13](#) includes policies applicable to the Countryside areas and includes

agricultural protection, protecting the ecological integrity of the Plan area, and supporting other rural uses that support the plan's objectives.

**Based on review and interpretation of provincial policies, the requests for urban expansion within the Greenbelt area on not recommended**

Through a number of reports and recommendations, Regional Council has requested the Province to consider processes and Provincial Plan amendments that would permit expansion of municipal services and/or urban uses. To date the Province has not responded with opportunities in this regard. Rather, the Province has indicated they are not proposing to open up the Greenbelt and will protect it for future generations. Minister Zoning Orders in the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville and the City of Markham explicitly restrict permitted urban uses to the whitebelt portions of the subject lands and include protective zoning for the entirety of the Greenbelt and Oak Ridges Moraine portions.

In light of the policies summarized in this memorandum, the requested urban expansions in the Gormley and Community of Stouffville areas are not recommended.



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Chief Planner



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