

Ministry of Municipal Affairs
and Housing

Ministère des Affaires municipales
et Logement

Municipal Services Division

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By email only

Augustine Ko, MCIP, RPP
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Community Planning and Development Services
Corporate Services Department
Regional Municipality of York
17250 Yonge Street
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RE: Regional Official Plan Amendment to Redesignate Prime Agricultural Areas

Dear Mr. Ko,

Thank you for circulating the regional official plan amendment (ROPA) application to the Ministry for our review. We understand the application was submitted by a consortium of private landowners seeking to change an Agricultural Area designation to a Rural Area designation in the Regional Official Plan.

The subject lands are comprised of separate areas of land located in both the City of Vaughan and the Town of Markham. The intent of the proposed change is to accommodate parkland, trails and other recreational uses within the Protected Countryside area of the Greenbelt Plan. Those proposed uses are permitted by the Greenbelt Plan.

We note the subject lands are located entirely within the Protected Countryside, are subject to the Greenbelt Natural Heritage System, and are further identified as part of the provincial Agricultural System – being designated as a prime agricultural area on provincial mapping of the agricultural land base.

MMAH REVIEW:

The following comments are provided for your consideration. As part of our review, we have shared the ROPA application with the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry.

Approval Authority:

In accordance with the *Planning Act* and O. Reg. 525/97, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing is the approval authority with respect to any amendment that is adopted to designate a prime agricultural area, or amends or revokes a prime agricultural area designation other than for the purposes of including all the applicable land within an area of settlement within the Greater Golden Horseshoe Growth Plan Area. Accordingly, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing is the approval authority for such a Regional Official Plan amendment regardless of whether it was initiated under section 17, section 22, or section 26 of the *Planning Act*.

Redesignation of Prime Agricultural Areas:

The Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (APTG) sets out in policy 4.2.6 that provincial mapping of the agricultural land base is in effect within the Greenbelt Area. As such, municipal decisions within the Greenbelt Area must conform with the Agricultural System policies in APTG. It is noted that the subject lands are within the Greenbelt Area and thus the Greenbelt Plan applies to them.

The refinement can occur either as part of a Municipal Comprehensive Review or outside of that process, provided the policies are properly implemented.

Policy 5.3 of the Greenbelt Plan states, “Within the Protected Countryside, upper- and single-tier municipalities shall refine and augment official plan mapping to bring prime agricultural areas and rural lands into conformity with provincial mapping and implementation procedures. Until the province has completed mapping and the Agricultural System implementation procedures, municipalities shall continue to retain existing designations for prime agricultural areas within the Protected Countryside.” The implementation procedures are discussed below.

The province released Publication 856, being the Implementation Procedures referred to in Policy 5.3 of the Greenbelt Plan, in March 2020. The Implementation Procedures apply to an official plan or official plan amendment which refines the boundaries of the rural areas and agricultural system in the Greenbelt Plan Area.

Section 3.3.2.3 of the Implementation Procedures (Adding Candidate Areas to Rural Lands Within the Agricultural Land Base) states: “By definition, the agricultural land base includes rural lands. The rural lands policies in the PPS, A Place to Grow and Greenbelt Plan apply and allow for a wider range of uses than in prime agricultural areas. This includes cemeteries, fairgrounds, campgrounds and recreation sites. Rural lands provide opportunities to locate rural, non-agricultural uses where appropriate, outside of prime agricultural areas. [...] Identification of rural lands within the agricultural land base is left to municipal discretion, as long as the Agricultural System purpose and outcomes are met.”

Parkland Uses in the Greenbelt Protected Countryside

Parkland and recreational uses are permitted within the rural areas of the protected countryside within the Greenbelt Plan Area. These uses can be an important and essential element of complete communities and provide important benefits to support

environmental protection, improved air quality and climate change mitigation (Policy 3.3.1). They provide essential recreational opportunities for Ontarians. There are many policies in the Greenbelt Plan which permit parkland and recreational uses within Protected Countryside. These policies could permit camping, golf courses, ski hills, hiking trails and larger parks or other recreational uses.

Thank you for circulating the proposed ROPA to Ministry staff for our consideration. If you have any questions or require any further information, please contact Laurie Miller at laurie.miller@ontario.ca

Sincerely,



Hannah Evans
Assistant Deputy Minister
Municipal Services Division

- c. Paul Freeman, Chief Planner, York Region
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