



YORK REGION FEDERATION OF AGRICULTURE

SERVING THE FARM COMMUNITY SINCE 1940

October 27, 2021

Regional Municipality of York
17250 Yonge Street
Newmarket, Ontario
L3Y 6Z1

Attention: Chair Emmerson and Regional Council

Dear Sirs/Madams:

**Re: Proposed York Region Official Plan Amendment No. 7
Regional Council Meeting Oct. 28 Item G.1 – C.O.W. Agenda Item H.2.1**

York Region Federation of Agriculture (YRFA) represents 650 registered farm business members in York Region on matters that affect their farms as well as decisions that will affect agriculture in the future. This letter is specifically related to the most recent staff report dated October 14, 2021, concerning the privately initiated Region Official Plan Amendment (ROPA) No. 7 (Agenda Item G.1 – C.O.W. Oct. 14, 2021 Item H.2.1).

YRFA has been monitoring the processing and review of the Region Official Plan Amendment No.7 and urge Council not to adopt this privately initiated amendment request. Approval of ROPA 7 would go against the Provincial Greenbelt Plan which protects Prime Agricultural Lands from urban uses outside of the settlement boundary.

The ROPA 7 lands are **593 hectares** within the Greenbelt Plan, outside of any Settlement Areas. As noted in the staff report (Page 5), the Ontario Municipal Board and the Divisional Court of Ontario have confirmed that urban uses are permitted within the Settlement Area boundary but are not intended within the Greenbelt. As noted on Page 6 of the staff report, the Provincial Greenbelt Plan (2017) identifies where urbanization should not occur in order to provide permanent protection to the agricultural land base and ecological and hydrological features, areas and functions. Based on these Provincial policies Regional Council should **not** support the proposed ROPA 7.

BUY THE FOOD ONTARIO GROWS

We agree with staff's concerns about the broader impacts of ROPA 7 (page 1 of the staff report),

“Approval of ROPA 7 would have implications on the other Greenbelt lands currently recommended through the Region’s Municipal Comprehensive Review, for redesignation from Agricultural Area, and potentially similar Greenbelt Lands beyond York Region.”

We are also very concerned about the serious precedent which will be set should Regional Council support ROPA 7 and should ROPA 7 be approved. Minimizing the importance of agricultural land and downgrading the Agricultural designation to protect such lands must stop. Region Council should be making every effort to prevent this loss of agricultural land. The Region should be striving to retain the agricultural designation of the Greenbelt fingers to ensure that access to local food supply is both protected and promoted. Agricultural activities in the Greenbelt can and should coexist with both ecological and adjacent urban activities. This would represent a balanced approach to growth management, the protection of the ecological system and the protection of the agricultural system.

In addition, a purpose of the Provincial Greenbelt Plan (2017) is to provide permanent protection to the agricultural land base. The most effective protection for the agricultural land base is for these lands to remain within an “Agricultural Area” designation. The Provincial Policy Statement (PPS) specifically refers to the protection of Prime Agricultural Areas for long-term use for agriculture. We note that the PPS specifically speaks to the designation of prime agricultural areas and retaining such designations to ensure that agricultural activities are sustained. The vision of the Greenbelt Plan is to protect quality agricultural areas, provide flexibility for appropriate farm uses, and strengthen the agricultural system by considering the impacts of development on agricultural areas and planning for local food and near-urban agricultural uses. The proposed down-designation would not reflect any of these objectives.

It is a stated objective in the current York Region Official Plan to protect Agricultural and Holland Marsh Specialty Crop Areas for the future to ensure a sustainable agricultural industry. The York Region Edge Planning Background Report speaks to the importance of farmland not only for the production of food and its direct economic benefits but also its benefits to surrounding urban residents in the form of such things as water filtration, carbon sequestration, pollination, and on-site farmers markets.

We continue to take the position that the proposed ROPA7 application should be denied. Council should be upholding the objectives of the Greenbelt Plan, the Provincial Policy Statement and its own Region Official Plan policies. Council needs to protect agricultural land in the Greenbelt and prevent urban uses outside of the Settlement Boundary. To allow such urban uses outside of the Settlement Boundary goes against the York Region Official Plan, the PPS and the Greenbelt Plan as well as decisions of the Ontario Municipal Board and the Divisional Court of Ontario.

Yours truly,

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cc: The Honourable Steve Clark, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing
The Honourable Lisa Thompson, Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs
The Honourable Paul Calandra
The Honourable Christine Elliott
The Honourable Logan Kanapathi
The Honourable Stephen Lecce
The Honourable Caroline Mulroney
The Honourable Michael Tibollo
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