

The Regional Municipality of York

Regional Council
Planning and Economic Development
December 15, 2022

Report of the Commissioner of Corporate Services and Chief Planner

Proposed Amendments to the Greenbelt and Oak Ridges Moraine Plans

1. Recommendations

1. Council endorse this report and Attachment 1 as the Region's response to the Environmental Registry of Ontario posting 019-6216: Proposed Amendments to the Greenbelt Plan and associated Environmental Registry of Ontario postings.
2. The Regional Clerk circulate this report to the local municipalities, local Members of Provincial Parliament, Provincial Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Toronto Region Conservation Authority, Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority and the Association of Municipalities of Ontario.

2. Summary

This report provides comments on the Province's proposed amendments to the Greenbelt Plan and Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan (the Plans) to provide opportunities to build housing as part of the Provincial goal to build 1.5 million homes by 2031.

Key Points:

- Province is proposing to remove or redesignate 2,995 hectares (7,400 acres) of the Greenbelt and Oak Ridges Moraine, to be made available for housing in the short term
- Within York Region, removals are contemplated in King, Vaughan, Whitchurch-Stouffville and Markham, totalling 330 hectares (815 acres)
- Area proposed in King is one site identified for the Southlake Regional Health Care Centre expansion
- These removals would become additional urban lands that go above and beyond what has been identified to accommodate growth to 2051 and considered from a servicing standpoint
- There is adequate opportunity for housing in York Region to address the Province's accelerated growth through intensification and expanded approved urban boundaries, without the need for these amendments as was noted by the Provincial Housing Affordability Task Force

3. Background

Province has proposed to redesignate or remove 330 hectares of protected Greenbelt land in York Region for urban development

On November 4, 2022, three proposals outlining proposed changes to the Greenbelt and Oak Ridges Moraine Plans were posted on the Environment Registry of Ontario (ERO) website as shown in Table 1. These proposals are redesignations or removals for 15 areas of land in the Greenbelt and if approved, are estimated to include 50,000 homes in the Greater Golden Horseshoe toward the Provincial target of 1.5 million homes by 2031.

Table 1

Greenbelt and Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plans Postings

| ERO Posting # | Title | Commenting Due Date |
|--------------------------|--|----------------------------|
| 019-6216 | Proposed Amendments to the Greenbelt Plan | December 4, 2022 |
| 019-6217 | Proposed amendments to the Greenbelt Area boundary regulation | December 4, 2022 |
| 019-6218 | Redesignation of land under the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan | December 4, 2022 |

The five areas in York Region, shown in Attachment 2, are within the Township of King, City of Vaughan, Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville and City of Markham totaling 53 hectares of redesignation and 277 hectares of removal. The purpose of redesignating or removing these lands is to (i) build housing with construction beginning no later than 2025, (ii) achieve “significant progress” on approvals by the end of 2023, and (iii) ensure landowners fund the necessary infrastructure. If these conditions are not met, the lands would be returned to the Greenbelt.

The proposals contain criteria that the Province used for the areas including offset requirements, adjacency to existing settlement areas, location on the edge of the Greenbelt boundary, servicing requirements and the lands having the ‘characteristics’ to enable housing to be built in the near term. The last two criteria have the biggest impact to Regional interests of infrastructure and growth management.

York Region places significant emphasis on protection of natural systems through the Greenlands System

The Region places significant emphasis on identification, protection, and enhancement of a linked Greenlands System as a permanent legacy for residents. Established in 1994, there have been a number of successes in protecting and securing the system through the planning process and the Greening Strategy. Natural systems identified through the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan, Greenbelt Plan and Lake Simcoe Protection Plan have expanded the system by protecting significant natural areas. The proposed amendments impact this system and would affect Regional Council's woodland cover and greenspace targets under the Region's Vision and Strategic Plan goal to enhance and preserve greenspace.

Greenbelt and Oak Ridges Moraine Plan boundaries undergo a review every 10 years

The Greenbelt is legislated by the *Greenbelt Act, 2005* and the *Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Act, 2001*, and their associated regulations. Policies for 10-year reviews are applicable for both Plans, the last of which took place five years ago in 2017. At that time, the Region was involved in receiving and evaluating submissions which resulted in minor adjustments to the boundaries. Through the 2017 Coordinated Provincial Plan Review of Provincial Plans, Council requested the Province stay the course by maintaining the integrity and objectives of the Greenbelt Plan and the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan.

4. Analysis

York Region has an adequate approved land supply for housing

The Municipal Comprehensive Review (MCR) and approved Regional Official Plan provide adequate urban land and servicing to accommodate the Province's housing objectives. Provincial approval of the Regional Official Plan (ROP) in November 2022 included the following modifications which offer additional opportunities for housing than what Council adopted:

- An additional 364 hectares of urban expansion in Whitchurch-Stouffville, King and Markham
- Four site specific 'special provisions' areas that increase maximum building heights and density in Aurora, Markham and Vaughan
- Two additional employment conversions in Vaughan
- Other modifications that signal further urban use designations for two areas in the Oak Ridges Moraine Plan to be approved by the Minister (not included in the current ERO posting):
 - The north-east corner of Teston Road and Dufferin Street in Vaughan
 - The area surrounding the Richmond Hill Gormley GO station, through a future major transit station area (MTSA) measuring approximately 800 metres from the station

The MCR included an extensive exercise to determine how to manage growth to 2051 including a Provincially mandated land needs assessment. The proposed Greenbelt and Oak Ridges Moraine Plan amendments through ERO posting 019-6216 would represent additional urban lands beyond the ROP modifications. The [Provincial Housing Affordability Task Force](#) stated Greenbelt lands were not required to address housing affordability in their February 2022 report.

These additional lands are not necessary to accommodate growth in York Region, nor do they align with infrastructure planning or provide housing where services and amenities already exist. Comments provided to the Province in time for Standing Committee consideration on the areas proposed for removal are outlined in Attachment 1.

Amendments need to be assessed for infrastructure impacts that may not be funded or planned

Wastewater servicing capacity in central and northern York Region is constrained until the servicing solution proposed through the Supporting Growth and Housing in York and Durham Regions Act, 2022 is in place. Development in areas within York and Durham Regions not previously considered for servicing will directly impact the Duffin Creek Water Pollution Control Plant. The proposed Greenbelt removals could increase the demand for wastewater servicing and will need to be coordinated with the existing and planned infrastructure capabilities. There may be pressure to amend currently planned serviced areas, or to expedite servicing for these proposed areas as the timelines for development are accelerated. If the lands in northern York Region are approved for urban development, adequate servicing would most likely only be available beyond the required 2025 deliverable for housing.

Urban use of these lands and increased population targets were not considered as part of Schedule 10 of Bill 23 dealing with northern York Region servicing. The cumulative impact of developing the proposed sites along with growth approved through the ROP needs to be considered to identify services and infrastructure needed to accommodate provincially planned growth. Housing to achieve the Province's goal is best suited to areas with existing or planned services.

Indigenous perspectives and public feedback during the Municipal Comprehensive Review have strong support for the Greenbelt and Oak Ridges Moraine areas

York Region engaged with First Nations and Indigenous communities to inform growth management and infrastructure master plans. Through those consultations, First Nations and Indigenous communities expressed the importance of protecting land and water for all living beings, protection of the environment and landscape connectivity. They reiterated the importance of protecting features in the Greenbelt and Oak Ridges Moraine given threats to the headwaters, wetlands and watercourses in Ontario. This sentiment was echoed by residents and other stakeholders.

Several local environmental groups have spoken out against the removals as some are within the Greenbelt Natural Heritage System and represent a narrowing of some north/south

environmental corridors. Amending the boundaries of these environmentally protected areas outside of the regularly scheduled 10-year review is not recommended.

Province should provide enough time to engage meaningfully with all stakeholders

One of the proposed areas in the Township of King represents the largest land area proposed to be redesignated and removed from the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation and Greenbelt Plans respectively. This land area is one option for expansion of the Southlake Regional Health Centre in Newmarket. The Township of King has passed a resolution supporting use of these lands for expansion of the Southlake Regional Health Centre. York Region is supportive of the hospital expansion and use of these lands if no existing urban lands are available.

Since creation of the Oak Ridges Moraine and Greenbelt Plans, the Province has consistently maintained protection of Greenbelt and Oak Ridges Moraine lands providing certainty for the Greenbelt area, for residents and the development industry. Protecting the Greenbelt was further confirmed by the Provincial Housing Affordability Task Force who recommended against removals to accommodate housing in February 2022. More recently, the Minister's approval of several GGH Official Plans provides for urban expansion (the largest in Hamilton and Halton with 2,200 and 3,350 net hectares respectively) outside the Greenbelt and Oak Ridges Moraine Plan areas that will now be available for housing. There have not been any studies or rationale provided recommending these additional specific lands in the Greenbelt being required for housing in the short term. The amendments were not planned or discussed with the Region or local municipalities. Should these areas be removed, there will likely be additional requests to remove other lands, and concern about long-term cohesive protection of the Greenbelt and Oak Ridges Moraine.

5. Financial

A review of Regional services of water, wastewater, and transportation in the proposed areas for adequate service levels would need to be evaluated. If the proposed amendments pass, and servicing is not available in these areas, there may be costs associated with increased and unplanned Regional infrastructure servicing.

6. Local Impact

Local municipalities play an important role in the development of communities. If the proposed amendments are approved, local municipalities must update their Official Plans to conform to the revised boundaries. Approval of new development applications in these areas would need to align with the modified land use designations.

7. Conclusion

The Greenbelt provides an important role in the ecological health of the Region and beyond, and offers agricultural and recreational opportunities for a high quality of life. The introduction of

the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation and Greenbelt Plans provide a consistent approach and framework to protect these areas for future generations.

Boundary amendments to the Greenbelt and Oak Ridges Moraine are not required for housing in York Region as there is an adequate supply of land and intensification opportunity. The Greenbelt was created for protection from urbanization. The Province should consult meaningfully with partners including the Region, municipalities, and Conservation Authorities in support of opportunities for housing while protecting the Greenbelt.

For more information on this report, please contact Sandra Malcic, Director, Long Range Planning at 1-877-464-9675 ext. 75274. Accessible formats or communication supports are available upon request.



Recommended by:

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Commissioner of Corporate Services



Approved for Submission:

Bruce Macgregor
Chief Administrative Officer

December 1, 2022

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Attachment 1 – Letter to Kate Manson-Smith, MMAH
Attachment 2 – Provincial Proposals for Amendments