

Chief Executive Officer



December 4, 2022

BY E-MAIL ONLY (greenbeltconsultation@ontario.ca)

**Re: TRCA Response to Request for Comments
Proposed Amendments to the Greenbelt Plan (ERO #019-6216)**

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this Environmental Registry of Ontario (ERO) posting by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH). Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) understand that to support the “More Homes Built Faster Plan,” the government is consulting on proposed changes to the Greenbelt Plan that would remove or redesignate 15 areas of protected land (seven are in TRCA’s jurisdiction), totaling 7,400 acres from the edge of the Greenbelt to build 50,000 new homes. In exchange, the Province is proposing to add 9,400 acres of land to the Greenbelt in the Paris Galt Moraine (outside TRCA’s jurisdiction) and thirteen Urban River Valleys (five are in TRCA’s jurisdiction) previously considered for addition through earlier phases of consultation on growing the Greenbelt.

TRCA has an interest in the proposed changes given our roles as:

- A regulator under Section 28 of the *Conservation Authorities Act*,
- A public commenting body under the *Planning Act* and the *Environmental Assessment Act*,
- A delegated commenting body to represent the provincial interest in natural hazards,
- A service provider to our municipalities, provincial and federal agency partners,
- A resource management agency operating on a local watershed basis, and
- One of the largest landowners in the Greater Toronto Area.

In these roles, and as stated in the “Made-in-Ontario Environment Plan,” conservation authorities work in collaboration with municipalities and stakeholders to protect people and property from flooding and other natural hazards, and to conserve natural resources.

Through Memorandums of Understanding and Service Level Agreements, TRCA provides technical support to its provincial and municipal partners in implementing environmentally responsible municipal growth management including development and infrastructure planning, siting and design. Further, TRCA recognizes the importance of efficiency, certainty, transparency and accountability in planning and design review processes, so that plans and projects can occur in a timely, safe and environmentally sustainable manner.

As stated in TRCA’s policy document, *The Living City Policies*, we support the legislated protection and management of the Greenbelt and continue to participate as a partner in coordinated programs to secure lands, provide stewardship, and advance the science and understanding of the provincial Greenbelt lands through watershed, groundwater, and natural heritage studies and monitoring.

GENERAL COMMENTS

TRCA shares the government's important goal of addressing the housing crisis through expedited development approvals and has taken streamlining actions that help support this objective. We do not believe, however, that resolving the housing crisis should come at the expense of the environment. To this end, we provide the following comments with the view that well planned sustainable development can happen in a timely manner while maintaining nature's beauty and diversity.

Land supply is not the problem

The Province's rationale for accessing portions of the Greenbelt for development is to, "help build housing faster and in a targeted manner, while leading to an overall expansion of the Greenbelt." The Report of the Ontario Housing Affordability Task Force (February 2022), however, states that, "a shortage of land isn't the cause of the problem" and that, "Greenbelts and other environmentally sensitive areas must be protected." The following is from page 10 of the Report (with emphasis added).

*The Greater Toronto Area is bordered on one side by Lake Ontario and on the other by the protected Greenbelt. Similarly, the Ottawa River and another Greenbelt constrain land supply in Ottawa, the province's second-largest city. But **a shortage of land isn't the cause of the problem. Land is available, both inside the existing built-up areas and on undeveloped land outside greenbelts.** We need to make better use of land ... Greenbelts and other environmentally sensitive areas must be protected, and farms provide food and food security. Relying too heavily on undeveloped land would whittle away too much of the already small share of land devoted to agriculture.*

TRCA supports the conclusions of the Task Force related to Greenbelts and notes an alignment with the findings of our municipal partners' comprehensive reviews (MCR) and related land needs analysis. Extensive MCR work made evident that an adequate land supply is available to meet provincially forecast housing needs to 2051 without removing or redesignating portions of the Greenbelt.

Unplanned Greenbelt removals ignore municipal planning and investment in the MCR process

MCR studies and land needs analysis undertaken by municipalities with CA technical support, (e.g., flood modelling and mapping updates, natural heritage and water resource system planning, urban tree canopy target setting, climate change resilience and adaptation measures) assumed that Greenbelt lands would remain undeveloped and therefore pervious. The proposed development of 50,000 units and associated hardscaping, infrastructure, and increased runoff volumes within the 7,400 hectares of land to be removed from the Greenbelt nullifies the assumption for total pervious lands. Unplanned development in isolated pockets of the Greenbelt diminishes the value of the MCR process and the municipal and CA investments required.

Meanwhile, the proposed removals for development in the Greenbelt increase the potential for downstream erosion and flooding hazards and impacts to natural heritage systems. Negative impacts to the groundwater system and functions may also occur if these areas are developed. Within TRCA jurisdiction, parts of these lands comprise significant recharge areas mapped in accordance with the requirements of the *Clean Water Act* and others are identified as ecologically significant groundwater recharge areas.

In light of the above, we recommend the Province work with our partner municipalities, TRCA, and the development industry to support responsible development within our watersheds in already studied and approved urban areas outside the Greenbelt.

Current science and policy must be considered to achieve responsible development

If Greenbelt lands are to be developed, it is imperative that Greenbelt natural system lands are set aside, and that development and infrastructure are planned, sited and designed to maintain and enhance natural system functions. Such an approach is needed to maintain the ecosystem goods and services that the system provides, and to conform to provincial policies for “protecting what is valuable” and “preparing for the regional and local impacts of a changing climate.”

If the Province persists with the proposed land exchange, TRCA recommends taking a natural systems- and science-based approach to offset environmental and agricultural impacts. The irreplaceable value of the Greenbelt is well-established for the vital ecosystem services it provides through the nature, water, and farmland it protects. Altering the OP entrenched boundaries of the Greenbelt without scientific analysis would undermine the ecological rationale and extensive consultation that shaped the Greenbelt Plan. As evidenced through TRCA’s site-specific analysis below, many of the sites proposed for removal contain NHS lands and are subject to natural hazards, yet there has been no analysis of the potential impacts of flooding and erosion or loss of biodiversity that could result from development and infrastructure being introduced to these areas.

Therefore, while we do not support changes to reduce the size of the Greenbelt, TRCA is prepared to work with our partner municipalities and the Province to leverage our independent scientific advice to inform their review of Greenbelt sites that are being considered for removal within TRCA’s watersheds. While we do not support removals, since many of these areas have not been factored into watershed studies, flood models and comprehensive updated natural heritage studies since they were assumed to be rural or non-urban uses, we strongly request that a comprehensive suite of studies and greenbelt setbacks, buffers and policies be a minimum requirement if any lands are removed.

TRCA maintains that the Greenbelt and the policy protections it provides should not be reduced. Should the removals proceed as proposed, we strongly recommend that the Province work with CAs and affected municipalities to ensure that natural heritage systems, natural hazards and science-based buffers/setbacks remain in the Greenbelt based on comprehensive watershed and natural heritage studies and that new development is required to maintain ecosystem functions.

Science-based approach to offsetting Greenbelt land removals

Under the *Greenbelt Act, 2005*, amendments cannot reduce the amount of land covered by the Greenbelt. The government proposes to offset the acreage of land that would be removed or redesignated to build housing by designating a portion of the Paris Galt Moraine and thirteen new Urban River Valleys (URVs) within the Greenbelt. This would diminish policy protections on 7,400 acres of land predominated by private ownership to facilitate development in exchange for Greenbelt URV lands that are already protected either because of public ownership or existing policy protections. With respect to URVs, a natural systems-based approach should be used to identify suitable additions to contribute to a true net gain in land exchange (please see Attachment 1 enclosed, TRCA’s previous comments on adding URVs to the Greenbelt).

TRCA maintains that the addition of new URVs to the Greenbelt affords no greater protection and does not represent a true net gain by virtue of these valley lands already being protected by existing policy, municipal by-laws and/or CA regulation. In addition to provincial policies that address natural heritage and hydrologic features and areas (i.e., PPS, Growth Plan, Source Protection Plans) and CA policies and regulations, these lands are largely designated in official plans as parks, open space, recreation, conservation and/or environmental protection. Moreover, the URV policies only apply to publicly owned lands and offer less protection than other geographic-specific Greenbelt policies (e.g., Greenbelt Natural System).

Through scientific and policy analysis and collaborative work with our partner municipalities, TRCA has developed and shared updated science-based mapping of natural heritage and water resources systems to assist with integrated efforts to conform to provincial policy requirements. As illustrated through our comments on previous government consultation on Growing the Greenbelt (ERO#s 019-4485, 019-4483 and 019-4803), TRCA has identified areas within our jurisdiction we believe would make more appropriate additions for Greenbelt expansion and would be in keeping with the Greenbelt Plan's objectives, vision and goals while further enhancing the quality and extent of existing protections. **TRCA recommends that lands being added go beyond URVs as suggested in our previous comments on Greenbelt additions, and that proximity be considered as a key principle, so lands being added and removed are within the same watershed.**

Greenbelt removals would create issues of precedence and incentivize land speculation

TRCA is concerned that the proposed removal of land from the Greenbelt will set a precedent for future removals, both within the Greenbelt and on other lands intended to be protected for long-term conservation or agricultural purposes. This precedent may spur land speculation and increase development pressure on sensitive environmental lands vital to biodiversity, ecosystem functions and climate change mitigation, particularly in TRCA's jurisdiction where the bulk of Ontario's growth is concentrated and forecast to persist until at least mid-century. It could also lead to a reluctance to dedicate privately owned land into public ownership for conservation purposes under the belief that lands could be developed in the future. The proposed removal of Greenbelt lands, if approved, will make land acquisition for green infrastructure including trails, expansion of conservation areas and other important flood protection, restoration and conservation projects including those that help support ecosystem compensation in urban areas more challenging.

Ecological off-setting should be based on the mitigation hierarchy and net ecological gain

The current ERO posting is unclear as to whether the entirety of land proposed for removal from the Greenbelt is necessary to build 50,000 homes, or if areas of land typically deemed unsuitable for development by other applicable policies and regulation would remain undeveloped. While TRCA maintains that development should generally not occur within natural features and systems, the Province should require ecological offsetting to ensure any features lost to development are adequately compensated. To this end, we point you to [TRCA's Guideline for Determining Ecosystem Compensation](#) as a scientifically defensible approach for replacing natural features and ecosystem functions lost through the development and/or infrastructure planning processes (after decisions necessitating compensation, as a last resort scenario, have been made). TRCA will also be providing comments on this topic through ERO 019-6161 "Conserving Ontario's Natural Heritage," which seeks feedback on ecological offsetting.

SITE-SPECIFIC COMMENTS

Of the 15 sites proposed for removal from the Greenbelt, seven are within TRCA's jurisdiction and contain TRCA regulated natural hazards and natural features. We provide the following detailed comments specific to each location. Please note that TRCA's concerns regarding Greenbelt land removals are compounded by diminished environmental protections due to *Conservation Authorities Act* and *Planning Act* amendments through Bill 23, proposed changes to the Ontario Wetland Evaluation System and merging of the Provincial Policy Statement and Growth Plan.

Overall, there are risks associated with removing these sites from the Greenbelt in advance of science-based technical studies and accurate delineation of natural hazards and natural heritage features, primarily the expectation that all lands removed from the Greenbelt can be developed. This could present considerable challenges whereby the accurate delineation of features and assessment of potential impacts will require study that may not be achievable within the development timeframes envisioned by the subject ERO posting.

Likewise, the lands proposed for removal may contain natural hazards and their associated setbacks that would restrict development potential across the site. Additional risks include an overall reduction in the natural hazard protections and the natural heritage system benefits of the established Greenbelt, with an overall reduction in corridor width and the associated loss of function as well as a reduction in opportunities for restoration and enhancement. The result would be an overall net loss of ecological and societal benefits from TRCA watersheds, which are under considerable pressure from land use changes and population growth. The concern for these potential impacts is heightened given the removals are proposed to be offset outside of the watershed experiencing the removals and associated impacts and most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

It should also be noted that natural hazard delineation, natural heritage system target setting, and implementation of established municipal and provincial policy are set based on the existing Greenbelt. Any contemplated removals would therefore upset what has long been established, requiring considerable effort on behalf of municipal governments, conservation authorities, other public agencies and / or the development community to correct.

The following site-specific comments speak to potential impacts of the proposed Greenbelt developments and make suggestions for how they might begin to be addressed. Notwithstanding these comments for minimizing and mitigating, TRCA recommends the application of the mitigation hierarchy (avoid, minimize, mitigate, compensate) to these Greenbelt lands should stop at “avoid”.

City of Vaughan - North and east of Teston Road and Pine Valley Drive

These lands currently provide a 690m wide connection between the valley to the east and the large block of Greenbelt Natural Heritage System (NHS) to the west. This connection provides a passable landscape to terrestrial species and development on this site could significantly impact that connectivity. TRCA landscape modelling has identified this area as a priority for maintaining regional connectivity among high quality habitat patches as well as for ensuring local connectivity for various species that depend on forests and wetlands. Pinching this connection to 265m, as proposed through the Greenbelt removal, would have a significant impact on the intended landscape connectivity and the species using the area.

The NHS on these properties includes a valley corridor, contiguous vegetation, floodplain, and Provincially Significant Wetlands (PSWs). The limits of these features are being determined/refined through the City of Vaughan Block 41 Block Plan review and supporting Master Environmental Servicing Plan (MESP). Removal of these areas from the Greenbelt will result in additional study to ensure impacts on the NHS and associated hazards are avoided and mitigated. Included in these studies would be updating the flood hazard mapping to incorporate the updated land-use scenarios and re-establishing development limits based on the updated floodplain mapping and updating all erosion modelling conducted as part of the subwatershed study and MESP. Finally, the stormwater management plan would have to be revised to consider the additional lands.

City of Richmond Hill - Hill east of Leslie Street, north of Elgin Mills Road East, west of Highway 404

The areas proposed for removal are immediately adjacent to, and on either side of, the Rouge River Headwater Wetland Complex, which is classified as a PSW and a tributary of the Rouge River. As such, they are subject to TRCA’s Regulation. The PSW consists of both marsh and swamp communities that provide protection to the sensitive cold-water stream that has groundwater upwellings due to the artesian groundwater conditions. These communities are both groundwater and surface water fed.

Appropriate buffers that have been previously agreed to in the MESP, the North Leslie Secondary Plan, and Ontario Municipal Board (OMB) hearing should be applied to all natural features and hazards on site. The minimum width

of the NHS in this area was set at 120 m for major tributaries (which this tributary has been classified as) through an OMB hearing.

All features have previously been staked, but may require updating, and the full extent of natural hazards (in particular flood plain) must be determined/delineated to ensure development is appropriately set back. The watercourse is also classified as an occupied reach for Redside Dace, an endangered species. The PSW is considered to be contributing Redside Dace habitat, that augments or maintains creek baseflow, coarse sediment supply and/or surface water quality of downstream occupied or recovery reaches. Science-based technical studies consistent with the North Leslie Secondary Plan and MESP Phases 1 and 2 should ensure that development on site would not have broader impacts on the natural heritage system and/or aggravate flooding and erosion hazards downstream.

While the west area proposed for removal contains a farmhouse and associated outbuildings, it does provide a mix of habitat types, including wetland, hedgerows and meadow, but most importantly, serves as a wildlife corridor that provides safe passage in a north-south direction immediately adjacent to Highway 404.

The east side of the valley corridor is immediately adjacent to Hwy 404. Although an overpass of the highway was contemplated through this area as part of the approved subdivision to the west, preliminary discussions for design would not accommodate access for the proposed development lands. Overpass design and grading issues with this crossing would likely require an additional road crossing of the Rouge River tributary as well as the associated PSW. This would result in a loss of PSW habitat and potential impacts to Redside Dace habitat beyond what would be occurring through the construction of the overpass alone. Currently, the NHS is approximately 160m in width, and would be reduced to approximately 90 m. This NHS width is not consistent with the OMB settlement, North Leslie Secondary Plan or the approved MESP.

In addition, the flood hazard mapping for the North Leslie area would need to be updated based on the updated land-use scenarios and re-establishing development limits based on the new floodplain mapping. Further, all erosion modelling conducted as part of the MESP would need to be reassessed for the additional area. Finally, the stormwater management plan would have to be revised to consider the additional impervious lands.

Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville - 11861 and 12045 McCowan Road

The lands proposed for removal are adjacent to and on either side of a wetland and valley corridor associated with a tributary of the Rouge River. Appropriate buffers should be applied to all natural features on site, which should be staked, and the full extent of associated flooding and erosion hazards must be determined/delineated to ensure development is appropriately set back. Additional science-based technical studies would be required to ensure that development on site would not have broader impacts on the natural heritage system and/or aggravate flooding and erosion hazards downstream.

City of Markham - 5474 19th Ave. at the northwest corner of 19th Ave. and McCowan Road

The area proposed for removal is partially within and immediately adjacent to a Regulatory floodplain and spill area associated with a headwater drainage feature of the Rouge River watershed. Appropriate buffers should be applied to all natural features on site, which should be staked, and the full extent of associated flooding and erosion hazards must be determined/delineated to ensure development is appropriately set back. Additional science-based technical studies would be required to ensure that development on site would not have broader impacts on the natural heritage system and/or aggravate flooding and erosion hazards downstream.

City of Markham - 10235, 10378 and 10541 Hwy 48

The areas proposed for removal are partially within and adjacent to a regulatory floodplain associated with watercourses and headwater drainage features of the Rouge River watershed. The areas also contain and are adjacent to evaluated and unevaluated wetlands, and areas where natural hazards have yet to be delineated.

Appropriate buffers should be applied to all natural features on site once staked, and the full extent of associated flooding and erosion hazards must be determined and delineated to ensure development is appropriately set back. Additional science-based technical studies would be required to ensure that development on site would not have broader impacts on the natural heritage system and/or aggravate flooding and erosion hazards downstream.

City of Markham - 10379 Kennedy Road

TRCA would not support development within the area proposed for removal. The proposed removal is within a candidate Area of Natural and Scientific Interest (Life Science) adjacent to a PSW Complex, Robinson Creek, and associated flooding and erosion hazards. Development within the area proposed for removal could destroy and/or fragment important interior portions of the NHS. We note that access to the site could become an issue and that high groundwater could impede development or require dewatering that could impact reliant natural features. It should also be noted that the City of Markham Official Plan identifies enhancement lands immediately north of the proposed Greenbelt removal.

City of Pickering - South of Highway 407, west of West Duffins Creek and north of the CP Belleville rail line

The proposal to remove these lands from the Agricultural Preserve is concerning. The purpose of this designation was to protect valuable farmland and natural heritage. Removing the lands from the Greenbelt puts both uses at risk and may be detrimental to continued east-west connections between Rouge National Park and the NHS of the Seaton lands. **Please see the attached letter (Attachment 2) detailing TRCA's comments on the Province's proposed revocation of the Central Pickering Development Plan (CPDP).**

A significant risk for development of these lands is the vulnerability of a currently unimpeded corridor connection between the watersheds of Rouge River, Petticoat Creek and Duffins Creek. The NHS, identified in the CPDP, includes minimum widths that were defined specifically for this area recognizing a natural heritage approach first to land use planning. The connections and corridors in the CPDP NHS provide ecological and societal benefits in an area that has yet to experience any pressures from urbanization and population growth. As part of the Greenbelt, this location helps maintain the ecological integrity of Rouge National Urban Park and supports the agricultural, natural and cultural heritage of the Park and its diverse landscapes within and adjacent to the Park. Our records and provincial studies identify numerous species at risk that would be impacted by this proposed land use change within this area.

Additional risks include an overall reduction in the natural hazard protections and / or the natural heritage system benefits of the established Greenbelt, with an associated loss of function as well as a reduction in opportunities for restoration and enhancement. This specific area is also vulnerable to losses of prime agricultural land, a priority of the Greenbelt Plan. The result is an overall net loss of ecological and societal benefits from the Greenbelt in an area that is under considerable pressure from land use changes and population growth. This impact is heightened by the fact that the removals are proposed to be offset outside of the Petticoat Creek and Duffins Creek watersheds and far removed from areas most vulnerable to the impacts of land use change.

The current flood hazard delineation for Petticoat Creek and Duffins Creek is based on this portion of the Greenbelt being undeveloped and pervious. Development of this area will result in increases in the flood hazard for this area and the downstream lands that are already flood prone. If development will proceed in this area, significant levels of study and floodplain mapping updates will be necessary, potentially including long term and costly flood hazard remediation projects to protect the downstream lands from the impacts of development in this area. Comprehensive watershed studies and flood modeling must occur to understand and potentially mitigate negative impacts arising from proposed urban development. Based on preliminary reviews downstream infrastructure including, regional, provincial and local infrastructure will need to be retrofitted and protected to address this proposed land use change if it is approved.

Town of Ajax – 765 and 775 Kingston Road East (CLOCA)

While these lands are within the jurisdiction of the Central Lake Ontario Conservation Authority (CLOCA) they are near TRCA’s regulated area of the Carruthers Watershed. We note that development on these lands would almost completely bisect the north-south corridor connecting Lake Ontario to the Oak Ridges Moraine referred to historically in regional official planning work as the “Lungs of Durham”. Reducing the width of this corridor at this pinch point will significantly diminish the functionality of the corridor. TRCA defers to CLOCA for site specific commentary on the natural system impacts at this location.

Concluding Comments

TRCA recommends the proposal to remove lands from the Greenbelt be withdrawn and that the Province instead refocus on implementation including catalyst infrastructure to implement the thousands of units approved by Minister Zoning Orders (MZOs) in flood prone but approved urban areas such as East Harbour in Toronto, Concord in Vaughan, and other sites. This implementation focused approach was recommended by TRCA to Standing Committee on Bill 23 as a means of ensuring the current adequate supply of land already approved for urban development can be optimized. The desire for rapid increase in housing supply shouldn’t mean Greenbelt removals, rather, in the context of rapid growth and intensification it becomes even more important to protect and enhance the natural systems and agricultural lands of the Greenbelt for the benefit of the new population and current and future generations. Such protection and enhancement will also bolster the resilience of the natural systems impacted by the demands of the new population. Such an approach will also help to optimize existing infrastructure and services such as transit where they are present with savings for taxpayers. Protecting the environment and providing housing in a timely fashion are both important, and one should not have to come at the expense of the other.

Should you have any questions, require clarification on any of the above, or wish to meet to discuss our remarks, please contact the undersigned at (416).667.6290 or at john.mackenzie@trca.ca.

Sincerely,

<Original Signed by>

John MacKenzie, M.Sc.(PI), MCIP, RPP
Chief Executive Officer

Encl: Attachment 1: TRCA Letter-ERO #019-4485, #019-4483, #019-4803 Growing the Size of the Greenbelt
Attachment 2: TRCA Letter-ERO#019-6174 Proposed Revocation of Central Pickering Development Plan

Cc: Laurie Nelson, Director, Policy Planning
Sameer Dhalla, Director, Development and Engineering Services



April 22, 2022

BY E-MAIL ONLY (greenbeltconsultation@ontario.ca)

Greenbelt Consultation
Provincial Planning Policy Branch
777 Bay Street, 13th floor
Toronto, ON M7A 2J3

Re: Proposed Amendments to the Greenbelt Plan (ERO #019-4485) and Area Boundary Regulation (EROs #019-4483) and Ideas for Adding More Urban River Valleys (ERO #019-4803)

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the above noted Environmental Registry (ERO) postings. TRCA conducts itself in accordance with the objects, powers, roles, and responsibilities set out for conservation authorities (CA) under the *Conservation Authorities Act* (CA Act) and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry's Procedural Manual chapter on CA policies and procedures for plan review and permitting activities. TRCA is:

- A public body under the *Planning Act* and *Environmental Assessment Act*;
- An agency delegated the responsibility to represent the provincial interest on natural hazards under Section 3.1 of the Provincial Policy Statement (PPS);
- A regulatory authority under Section 28 of the CA Act;
- A service provider to municipal partners and other public agencies;
- A Source Protection Authority under the *Clean Water Act*;
- A resource management agency; and
- A major landowner in the Greater Toronto Area.

In these roles, and as stated in the "A Made-In-Ontario Environment Plan," TRCA works in collaboration with municipalities and stakeholders to protect people and property from flooding and other natural hazards, and to conserve natural resources. Through Memorandums of Understanding and Service Level Agreements, TRCA provides technical support to its provincial and municipal partners in implementing municipal growth management policies. TRCA provides science-based policy advice to municipalities related to planning and environmental assessment applications in the Provincial Greenbelt to achieve land use and infrastructure planning decisions that conform to the Greenbelt Plan. The Plan's Urban River Valley designation confers a provincial interest on urban river valleys already protected through municipal official plan policies and TRCA's Regulation and policies.

Government Proposal

Through the subject EROs, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing is undertaking Phase 2 consultation to grow the Greenbelt. In doing so, we understand that the Ministry intends to build upon previous feedback through Phase 1 of this consultation and seek additional input on proposed amendments to the Greenbelt Plan (including Schedules 1, 2, and 4) and Greenbelt Area Boundary Regulation (Ontario Regulation 59/09) that would add thirteen new Urban River Valley (URV) areas to the Greenbelt Plan.

Additionally, we understand that general feedback for other potential new URV additions or expansions to the Greenbelt is also being sought, provided such recommendations reflect the "Key Principles for Expanding the Greenbelt" identified in Phase 1.

We note that, of the thirteen new URVs proposed, five are located within TRCA's jurisdiction along the Don and Humber River valley corridors within the limits of the City of Toronto. Specifically, the proposals would include portions of the following watercourses:

Don River

- Burke Brooke
- Wilket Creek
- Taylor Massey Creek

Humber River

- Humber Creek
- Black Creek

Comments

TRCA offers the following comments, which are reflective of those previously provided to the Ministry through Phase 1 consultation on Growing the size of the Greenbelt on April 19, 2021 (ERO# 019-3136).

TRCA supports increasing the size of the Greenbelt through new or expanded URVs, especially from an educational and awareness-raising standpoint. As stated in the Greenbelt Plan, the river valleys that run through existing or approved urban areas and connect the Greenbelt to inland lakes and the Great Lakes are a key component of the long-term health of the Natural System.

As per policy 6.2.1 of the Greenbelt Plan, Greenbelt policies related to URVs only apply to public lands. By virtue of this policy application and the new URVs being predominantly on public lands, the new URVs are already protected through other policy and regulatory means. In addition to being protected by existing provincial policies that address natural heritage and hydrologic features and areas (i.e., PPS, Growth Plan, Source Protection Plans) and CA policies and associated regulations, URV lands are typically already designated for protection in official plans (OPs) as parks, open space, recreation, conservation and/or environmental protection.

TRCA has been collaborating with our municipal partners to provide updated science-based Natural Heritage System (NHS) mapping to inform municipal OP updates through the Municipal Comprehensive Review (MCR) process. TRCA has also developed Water Resource System (WRS) data layers to help our municipal partners conform to new provincial policies requiring identification of the WRS. These scientific and systems-based areas (or portions thereof) would more effectively inform future Greenbelt expansions once the NHS and WRS frameworks are in place and related components of MCR work conclude.

TRCA would welcome the opportunity to help delineate and/or refine the most appropriate boundary expansions based on science and in consultation with affected municipalities. However, until MCRs are complete in accordance with the upcoming July 1, 2022 conformity deadline imposed through the Growth Plan, the implications of Greenbelt expansion on other provincial priorities cannot be fully understood, particularly in relation to updated NHS and WRS mapping, Land Needs Assessments, long-term infrastructure planning and the implementation of the Province's Agricultural System.

Notwithstanding the above, TRCA has identified areas we believe generally align with the Province's criteria for URV expansion and would be in keeping with the Greenbelt Plan's objectives, vision and goals while further enhancing the quality and extent of existing protections. Examples of these areas include, but are not limited to:

- Major watercourses in our jurisdiction currently excluded from the Greenbelt but linked to existing Greenbelt areas, URVs with direct connections through the Plan's natural heritage, and water resource systems linked through Lake Ontario.
- Relatively small, isolated pockets, primarily consisting of prime agricultural land containing and/or adjacent to natural features fully encapsulated by (but outside) larger swaths of the Greenbelt, which if enveloped by the Greenbelt would form and further enhance a continuous broad band or protected land built upon the Greenbelt's systems approach.

- Provincially owned lands within the natural heritage system of current OPs that, if expanded, would link existing Greenbelt areas across watershed corridors as part of a larger, connected system.
- Stretches of former Lake-Iroquois shoreline between existing URVs, which represent largely east-west wildlife habitat movement corridors and areas of increased groundwater recharge and discharge functions.

With regard to the ERO's request for ideas to expand the Greenbelt, **TRCA recommends that the Province review the URV policies, with a focus to consider a natural systems-based approach to expanding and enhancing the Greenbelt rather than a private versus public land ownership criteria.** This would better reflect the Province's key factors of Greenbelt expansion and enhancement, as listed in the ERO posting, (i.e., to allow for the ecological connection and integration of the Greenbelt into urban settings through river valley connections, and to protect natural and open space lands to assist in ecological connections, natural heritage and hydrologic features and functions of river valleys).

TRCA's Living City Policies states that TRCA supports the legislated protection and management of the Greenbelt and continues to participate as a partner in coordinated programs to secure lands, provide stewardship, and advance the science and understanding of the Provincial Greenbelt lands through watershed, groundwater, and natural heritage studies and monitoring. Accordingly, **should the Province not consider the above recommendation, TRCA recommends that the Province consider proposing and consulting on a mechanism for newly acquired public lands, that meet provincial criteria for Greenbelt/URV expansion, to be added to the Greenbelt.**

Thank you once again for the opportunity to provide comments on this proposal. Should you have any questions, require clarification on any of the above, or wish to meet to discuss our remarks, please contact the undersigned at 416.661.6600, Ext. 5281 or at laurie.nelson@trca.ca.

Sincerely,

<Original signed by>

Laurie Nelson, MCIP, RPP
Director, Policy Planning

BY E-MAIL

cc:

TRCA: John MacKenzie, Chief Executive Officer
Sameer Dhalla, Director, Development and Engineering Services
Alexander Schuler, Associate Director, Property, Assets and Risk Management

Chief Executive Officer



November 24, 2022

BY E-MAIL ONLY (MSOC.Admin@ontario.ca)

**Re: Response to Request for Comments
Proposed Revocation of the Central Pickering Development Plan (ERO #019-6174)**

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this posting on the Environmental Registry of Ontario (ERO) by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH) which proposes to revoke the Central Pickering Development Plan (CPDP), under the Ontario *Planning and Development Act, 1994*. As the ERO states, this proposal intends to help support the government's commitment to streamline, reduce and eliminate burdens and to potentially increase housing supply.

Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) has an ongoing interest in the proposed changes given our roles as:

- A regulator under Section 28 of the *Conservation Authorities Act* (CA Act);
- A public commenting body under the *Planning Act* and the *Environmental Assessment Act*;
- A delegated commenting body to represent the Provincial interest in natural hazards;
- A service provider to our municipal partners;
- A resource management agency operating on a local watershed basis; and
- One of the largest landowners in the Greater Toronto region owning and directly managing lands and conducting programs and projects in collaboration with the province, municipalities, stakeholders, and indigenous communities within the confines of the CPDP area.

In these roles, and as stated in the *Made-in-Ontario Environment Plan*, CAs work in collaboration with municipalities and stakeholders to protect people and property from flooding and other natural hazards, and to conserve natural resources.

COMMENTS

TRCA appreciates the Province's important goal of addressing the housing crisis through expediting development approvals and has taken streamlining actions that help support this objective. We do not believe, however, that resolving the housing crisis needs to come at the expense of the environment. To this end, we provide the following comments to ensure that well planned sustainable development can happen safely while maintaining nature's beauty and diversity.

Revocation of the CPDP would remove an area-specific policy framework focused on the permanent protection, maintenance and enhancement of natural features, functions and systems. Revocation of the CPDP combined with recent legislation will also remove protection of areas that previous governments and stakeholders intended to be preserved for agricultural and conservation uses. Careful consideration of the CPDP and its objectives were shaped by previous provincially led EA and planning processes that

involved extensive public and stakeholder consultation including consultation with indigenous communities. These CPDP objectives were refined through the Seaton Community Master Environmental Servicing Plan Amendment (MESPA) process, but the MESPA is not a statutory document. Amendment 22 to the Pickering Official Plan (OP) provides policies for developing and managing the Seaton community but is subject to potential amendment. Further, there are no applicable higher level regional policies that would articulate the strong policies in the CPDP as the Region of Durham's OP only defers to the CPDP. Together, proposed changes through Bill 23 to the CA Act, the proposed repeal of the Duffins Rouge Agricultural Preserve Act, proposed removal of the Duffins Rouge Agricultural Preserve from the Greenbelt, and proposed changes to the Ontario Wetland Evaluation System create potential for loss of significant biodiversity and damage to downstream areas of the Petticoat and Duffins Creek watersheds. Without clarity on how features and functions will be protected in the absence of the CPDP, these proposed changes will increase the vulnerability of this area's natural systems, significant natural features, and endangered species that were proposed to be protected permanently through the CPDP, Greenbelt, and other legislative protections.

To date, the CPDP has been successful in achieving the goals set out in its mandate, however, the ERO posting does not provide any insight into how these important objectives would continue to be met. Rather, the ERO posting highlights how neither Pickering or Durham Region's OPs have adopted the full approach of the CPDP and that further planning approvals (e.g., subdivision approvals) will continue to be implemented. Prior to revocation of the CPDP, a high-level replacement policy framework articulating the objectives of the original Plan should be in place to ensure that the Region of Durham and City of Pickering adopt strong policies in support of protecting natural systems and comprehensive policy framework to guide planning decisions for all of the CPDP area. Any changes in these areas may also require initiation of new infrastructure and planning processes in neighbouring municipalities including York, Markham, and Toronto which were factored into CPDP development.

Revoking the CPDP would leave lands in the approved MESPA highly susceptible to negative impacts of development and potentially exacerbate natural hazards in downstream areas. The removal of the CPDP would nullify the extensive review and approval process that went into identifying the impacts of residential, employment, commercial and infrastructure in the Duffins Creek watershed including the sizing of servicing and infrastructure to support these thresholds. It could also result in provincially owned properties and privately owned lands slated for dedication into public ownership being developed and henceforth removed from the natural heritage system. Further, from the recently proposed draft City of Pickering's Comprehensive Zoning By-Law, there appears to be no intention to uphold the full extent of the provincially identified Seaton Natural Heritage System as identified in the MESPA or the CPDP. Converting existing environmental protection within the Greenbelt Protected Countryside, Seaton NHS, and Duffins Rouge Agricultural Preserve to other zoning designations could result in negative impacts. The Province has recommended that the CPDP should be adopted into the municipal plans, however, this has not been the case, as is clearly demonstrated in the City's draft By-law of August 2022.

The protection of the Duffins Rouge Agricultural Preserve is a crucial factor in protecting the Rouge National Urban Park and ecosystem components of the Rouge River, Duffins Creek and Petticoat Creek watersheds. Downstream portions of these creeks are particularly susceptible to flooding impacts and these issues must be addressed in any replacement municipal policy framework if the CPDP is removed. By promoting connectivity free from urbanization between the Rouge, Petticoat and Duffins watershed, the ecological systems can be conserved and restored as intended. Opening lands for new infrastructure and or development within this area without proper and extensive planning could undermine the important goals of ecological connectivity, gene dispersion and system connection of the corridors with

potential impacts on infrastructure and downstream communities subject to flood risk. Thus, **TRCA strongly recommends that clear direction be provided to affected municipalities to ensure that municipal OPs and by-laws uphold the ecological systems established through the CPDP and consistent with the Duffins Creek Watershed Plan prior to revocation. We also strongly recommend that the CPDP stay in place until a watershed and subwatershed plan for Petticoat Creek is completed, until related and linked legislative processes are complete, and details of proposed infrastructure improvements to the York Durham Sewer System in Bill 23 are better known.**

Finally, TRCA recommends that the Province pause the proposed revocation of the CPDP and convene a special panel to include the City of Pickering, City of Markham, City of Toronto, York and Durham Regions, Rouge Park/Parks Canada and TRCA which could include the Province (Infrastructure Ontario) and other landowners to identify shared interests, potential impacts of this decision, mitigative policies and a path forward that would protect and restore natural systems and address natural hazard risks in this area and in downstream areas.

Should you have any questions, require clarification, or wish to meet to discuss any of the above remarks, please contact the undersigned at 416.667.6920 or at john.mackenzie@trca.ca.

Sincerely,

< Original Signed By >

John MacKenzie, M.Sc.(PI), MCIP, RPP
Chief Executive Officer

Cc: Sameer Dhalla, Director, Development and Engineering Services
Laurie Nelson, Director, Policy Planning
Steve Heuchert, Associate Director, Development Planning and Permits