



OAKVILLE

REPORT

Planning and Development Council

Meeting Date: April 12, 2021

FROM: Planning Services Department

DATE: April 6, 2021

SUBJECT: Provincial Consultation on Growing the Size of the Greenbelt

LOCATION: Town of Oakville

WARD: Town-wide

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RECOMMENDATION:

1. That the report titled *Provincial Consultation on Growing the Size of the Greenbelt*, dated April 6, 2021, be endorsed as the basis for a submission to the province through Environmental Registry Posting #019-3136 by the deadline of April 19, 2021.
2. That the report titled *Provincial Consultation on Growing the Size of the Greenbelt*, dated April 6, 2021, be forwarded for information to Halton Region, the City of Burlington, the Town of Halton Hills, the Town of Milton, Credit Valley Conservation, Grand River Conservation Authority and Conservation Halton.

KEY FACTS:

The following are key points for consideration with respect to this report:

- The 2017 Greenbelt Plan, along with the 2019 Growth Plan, as amended, is part of an overarching strategy to protect lands and manage growth in the Greater Golden Horseshoe, including the Town of Oakville.
- The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing is seeking feedback on ways to grow the size of the Greenbelt.
- Oakville's Town Council has consistently supported efforts by the province and other agencies to expand and strengthen the Greenbelt.
- This report reviews the province's proposal for growing the size of the Greenbelt and provides town staff commentary as the basis for a submission to the province.

BACKGROUND:

The 2017 Greenbelt Plan was first introduced in 2005 to help shape the future of the Greater Golden Horseshoe, including the Town of Oakville. Along with the 2019 Growth Plan, as amended, it provides an overarching strategy that offers clarity and certainty about urban structure, where and how future growth should be accommodated and what must be protected for current and future generations.

The 2017 Greenbelt Plan identifies 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.

The 2017 Greenbelt Plan is also structured to provide for the inclusion of publicly owned lands in urban river valleys. These lands assist in recognizing the importance of connections to Lake Ontario and other areas in southern Ontario.

The 2017 Greenbelt Plan can be found at <https://www.ontario.ca/document/greenbelt-plan-2017>

The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing is seeking feedback on ways to grow the size of the Greenbelt. On February 17, 2021 the proposal titled “Consultation on growing the size of the Greenbelt” was posted to the Environmental Registry of Ontario #019-3136 and can be found at <https://ero.ontario.ca/notice/019-3136>

The full text of the proposal is attached in Appendix A. The proposal identifies two priority areas for growing the size of the Greenbelt:

- A study area of lands focused on the Paris Galt Moraine
- Ideas for adding, expanding and further protecting Urban River Valleys

The province’s consultation is open for a 61-day period ending on April 19th, 2021.

Oakville’s Town Council has consistently supported efforts by the province and other agencies to strengthen the Greenbelt and to expand the lands within Oakville that should be governed and protected by this plan, including:

- January 2013 - Greenbelt Plan Amendment No. 1 which introduced the Urban River Valley designation to the Greenbelt Plan and applied that designation to the Glenorchy Conservation Area in the northern reaches of Oakville.
- July 2017 – Through the province’s Coordinated Plan Review, the Urban River Valley designation was applied to segments of Sixteen Mile Creek, Fourteen Mile Creek and Bronte Creek.

At their meeting of March 24, 2021, Regional Council endorsed report LPS29-21 titled *Provincial Consultation on Growing the Size of the Greenbelt*.

Based on that report, Regional Council directed regional staff to prepare a submission to the province. LPS29-21 may be viewed here:
<https://edmweb.halton.ca/OnBaseAgendaOnline/Meetings/ViewMeeting?id=4202&doctype=1>

Town staff supports the region's approach and recommendations.

COMMENT/OPTIONS:

This report reviews the province's proposal for growing the size of the Greenbelt and provides initial town staff commentary as the basis for a submission to the province.

Town staff notes that this consultation is the first stage in a multi-step process for the province to consider additional lands for inclusion in the Greenbelt. The next steps will follow the provincial amendment process, including:

- Further technical analysis of the candidate sites,
- Consultation municipalities and agencies in the Greenbelt area, and
- Consultation with the public.

Principles for Growing the Greenbelt

Through this consultation, the province has identified a set of principles to apply when considering expansions to the Greenbelt. The full text is in Appendix A:

1. No consideration of removal requests or land exchanges
2. No consideration of policy changes
3. Supports Greenbelt Plan objectives, vision and goals
4. Follows Existing Amendment Process
5. Connects physically and/or functionally to the current Greenbelt
6. Considers impacts on existing provincial priorities

Other Provincial Priorities to Consider for Growing the Greenbelt

The province has identified other provincial priorities that could be impacted when considering where and how to grow the Greenbelt, as follows:

“Growth Management – Overall, the Greenbelt Plan broadly identifies where urbanization should not occur and A Place to Grow directs the majority of growth to fully serviced settlement areas. Currently, municipalities are working towards updating their official plans by 2022 to conform with the revised growth forecasts in Schedule 3 of A Place to Grow. Therefore, Greenbelt expansion needs to be considered in the context of these growth management exercises by municipalities.

Natural Heritage and Water Resource Systems – The Greenbelt Plan and A Place to Grow are aligned with and build on the Provincial Policy Statement to provide policy protection for natural heritage and water resource systems, features and areas, including habitat for endangered and threatened species. Both the Greenbelt Plan and A Place to Grow contain policies supporting and protecting a Natural Heritage System that is made up of these natural features and areas along with the linkages that connect them together. Similarly, policies in these plans protect water resource systems on a watershed basis, with the Greenbelt incorporating significant headwaters, river corridors, wetlands and other features.

Agriculture – The Greater Golden Horseshoe contains some of Canada’s best agricultural land. Both the Greenbelt Plan and A Place to Grow have policies supporting and protecting an Agricultural System that is comprised of an agricultural land base (prime agricultural areas, including specialty crop areas, and other productive lands that form a continuous land base for agriculture) and an agri-food network (infrastructure, services and assets that support the agri-food sector).

Infrastructure – Both the Greenbelt Plan and A Place to Grow recognize that new infrastructure and upgrades to existing infrastructure will be needed to serve the substantial growth projected for the Greater Golden Horseshoe. Infrastructure, including highways to sewage and water treatment plants to corridors for transit and utilities, is permitted in these plans subject to certain conditions.”

Provincial Consultation – Discussion Questions

The province is asking a series of questions related to growing the size of the Greenbelt as identified below. Preliminary town staff responses that would form the basis of the submission to the province are also provided.

Additional comments from Oakville Council would also be included as part of the submission to the province.

Question 1 – What are your thoughts on the initial focus area of the Study Area of the Paris Galt Moraine?

Background - The Paris Galt Moraine ranges from Brantford in the southwest, through north Milton and Halton Hills, to Caledon in the northeast. It is an area of environmental and economic importance to Halton Region and its local municipalities and agencies.

The Paris Galt Moraine contributes to the headwaters for many streams and rivers as well as recharging groundwater aquifers and supporting drinking water systems.

Town Staff Response – Based on its environmental and economic importance in this region, Oakville supports the addition of the Paris Galt Moraine to the Greenbelt.

Question 2 – What are the considerations in moving from a Study Area to a more defined boundary of the Paris Galt Moraine?

Town Staff Response – The refinement of the study area and further consideration of the Paris Galt Moraine for inclusion in the Greenbelt should be supported by appropriate scientific and technical studies.

The province should also engage with the relevant Conservation Authorities on scientific and technical matters in the determination of a more defined boundary of the Paris Galt Moraine to be included in the Greenbelt.

For areas being studied and considered for inclusion in the Greenbelt, the province should ensure that affected property owners are directly notified.

Further, public engagement opportunities with these property owners and interested stakeholders should be robust and community focused.

Finally, public engagement by the province should recognize and accommodate the limitations around electronic communications and broadband access across the study area, with a particular focus on participants from the rural area.

Question 3 – What are your thoughts on the initial focus area of adding, expanding and further protecting Urban River Valleys?

Background – In the Oakville setting, the Urban River Valley designation applies to lands within river valleys that connect the main Greenbelt to Lake Ontario. These include river valleys and associated lands containing natural and hydrologic features as well as lands designated in official plans for uses such as parks, open space, recreation, conservation and environmental protection.

The policies of the Urban River Valley designation apply only to public lands and have regard for the applicable municipal official plan policies. In Oakville, the designation applies to the Glenorchy Conservation Area in the northern reaches of Oakville and segments of Sixteen Mile Creek, Fourteen Mile Creek and Bronte Creek.

Town Staff Response – Currently, Fourteen Mile Creek is only designated Urban River Valley north of the QEW/North Service Road. Oakville recommends that the province consider the remaining Fourteen Mile Creek valley lands south to Lake Ontario for inclusion in the Greenbelt under the Urban River Valley Designation.

Oakville also recommends that the province consider Joshua Creek Valley for inclusion in the Urban River Valley designation to connect the east side of Oakville down to Lake Ontario. Both of these candidate areas are identified on the figure in Appendix B.

Oakville also supports the province's proposal to study including public lands beyond 60-metres in the Urban River Valley designation where appropriate and consistent with natural heritage designations in local official plans.

Town staff notes that the Urban River Valley designation reflects external connections and conceptual linkages from the main Greenbelt to Lake Ontario.

The policies are intended to encourage and recognize these linkages and would not impose additional requirements or protections on these public lands beyond the policies of the Livable Oakville Official Plan.

The Urban River Valley designation would not prohibit continued or future passive or active uses in the town's parks and open space lands where appropriate.

For any study areas being considered for inclusion in the Greenbelt, it is important that the Province provide opportunities for robust consultation with the public.

Question 4 – Do you have suggestions for other potential areas to grow the Greenbelt?

Town Staff Response – Oakville supports growing the Greenbelt where these candidate areas are proposed and supported by the town's municipal and agency partners in Halton.

Study areas being considered for inclusion in the Greenbelt should be accompanied by extensive consultation with the public.

Question 5 – How should we balance or prioritize any potential Greenbelt expansion with the other provincial priorities mentioned above?

Background – The other provincial priorities to consider for growing the Greenbelt are described in a previous section of this report and include growth management, natural heritage and water resource systems, agriculture and infrastructure.

Town Staff Response – Within Oakville, including additional lands in the Urban River Valley designation would not impede the province’s growth management, infrastructure, and natural heritage and water resource system priorities.

Oakville also supports the consideration of the establishment of an agricultural preserve to support the Agricultural System within Halton Region for the long-term.

For any study areas being considered for inclusion in the Greenbelt, it is important that the Province provide opportunities for robust consultation with the public.

Question 6 – Are there other priorities that should be considered?

Town Staff Response – Climate change is a priority that should be considered for growing the Greenbelt. Any effort to strengthen the Greenbelt and increase resiliency will contribute to the province’s broader efforts to address climate change.

CONSIDERATIONS:

(A) PUBLIC

There are no notice requirements from this report.

(B) FINANCIAL

There are no financial considerations from this report.

(C) IMPACT ON OTHER DEPARTMENTS & USERS

Multiple town departments have had the opportunity to provide input to this report.

(D) CORPORATE STRATEGIC GOALS

This report addresses the corporate strategic goal to:

- be the most livable town in Canada.

(E) CLIMATE CHANGE/ACTION

Growing the size of the Greenbelt is an action to adapt to Climate Change.

APPENDICES:

Appendix A – Environmental Registry Posting 019-3136

Appendix B – Lands to be considered for growing the size of the Greenbelt

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