

Greenbelt Plan

Introduction

The Greater Golden Horseshoe (a term used to describe the large economic zone surrounding the City of Toronto, from Durham in the east to Niagara in the west) is one of the fastest growing regions in North America. By 2031, about four million more people - a number about equal to the combined populations of Vancouver, Calgary and Edmonton - are expected to move to the Greater Golden Horseshoe. This growth will add about two million more jobs and create new strength in our economy. It will also create significant challenges to planned, thoughtful and well-managed growth in the Greater Golden Horseshoe. That's why Ontario needs long-term strategies to keep our communities and our economy strong, and our environment healthy.

The Greenbelt is a cornerstone of Ontario's *Greater Golden Horseshoe Growth Plan* which is an overarching strategy that provides 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 Greenbelt Plan identifies where urbanization should not occur in order to provide permanent protection to the agricultural land base and the ecological features and functions occurring on this landscape.

The area protected by the Greenbelt Plan is made up of an Agricultural System and a Natural System, together with a series of settlement areas. The Agricultural System is made up of specialty crop, prime agricultural and rural areas. The Natural System identifies lands that support both natural heritage and hydrologic features and functions. Both systems maintain connections to the broader agricultural and natural systems of southern Ontario. Settlement areas vary in size, diversity and intensity of uses and are found throughout the protected areas.

While providing permanent agricultural and environmental protection, the Greenbelt also contains important natural resources and supports a wide range of recreational and tourism uses, areas and opportunities together with a vibrant and evolving agricultural and rural economy.

Within the vast majority of south-central Ontario and substantial portions of the Greater Golden Horseshoe beyond the Greenbelt Area, there are extensive agricultural areas, natural and hydrologic features and functions, and other significant resources. The lack of inclusion within the Greenbelt Area does not imply any lesser importance or recognition of the full array of natural environmental and resource attributes found in these areas. Rather, all lands outside of the Greenbelt Area will continue to be governed by current, and potentially future, planning frameworks and regimes which manage land use in Ontario.

Vision

The Greenbelt is a broad band of permanently protected land which:

- Protects against the loss and fragmentation of the agricultural land base and supports agriculture as the predominant land use;
- Gives permanent protection to the natural heritage and water resource systems that sustain ecological and human health and that form the environmental framework around which major urbanization in south-central Ontario will be organized; and
- Provides for a diverse range of economic and social activities associated with rural communities, agriculture, tourism, recreation and resource uses.

Goals

To enhance our urban and rural areas and overall quality of life by promoting the following matters within the protected area:

1. Agricultural Protection

- a. Protection of the *specialty crop area* land base while allowing supportive infrastructure and value added uses necessary for sustainable agricultural uses and activities;
- b. Support for the Niagara Peninsula *specialty crop area* as a destination and centre of agriculture focused on the agri-food sector and agri-tourism related to grape and tender fruit production;
- c. Protection of *prime agricultural areas* by preventing further fragmentation and loss of the agricultural land base caused by lot creation and the redesignation of *prime agricultural areas*;
- d. Provision of the appropriate flexibility to allow for *agriculture, agriculture-related* and *secondary uses, normal farm practices* and an evolving agricultural/rural economy; and
- e. Increasing certainty for the agricultural sector to foster long-term investment in, improvement to, and management of the land.

2. Environmental Protection

- a. Protection, maintenance and enhancement of natural heritage, hydrologic and *landform* features and functions, including protection of habitat for flora and fauna and particularly species at risk;
- b. Protection and restoration of natural and open space connections between the Oak Ridges Moraine, the Niagara Escarpment, Lake Ontario, Lake Simcoe and the major river valley lands, while also maintaining connections to the broader natural systems of southern Ontario beyond the Golden Horseshoe such as the Great Lakes Coast, the Carolinian Zone, the Lake Erie Basin, the Kawartha Highlands and the Algonquin to Adirondacks Corridor;
- c. Protection, improvement or restoration of the quality and quantity of ground and surface water and the hydrological integrity of watersheds; and
- d. Provision of long-term guidance for the management of natural heritage and water resources when contemplating such matters as development, infrastructure, open space planning and management, aggregate rehabilitation and private or public stewardship programs.

3. Culture, Recreation and Tourism

- a. Support for the conservation and promotion of cultural heritage resources;
- b. Provision of a wide range of publicly accessible built and natural settings for recreation including facilities, parklands, open space areas, trails and water-based/shoreline uses that support hiking, angling and other recreational activities; and
- c. Enabling continued opportunities for sustainable tourism development.

4. Settlement Areas

- a. Support for a strong rural economy by allowing for the social, economic and service functions through the residential, institutional and commercial/industrial uses needed by the current and future population within the Greenbelt, particularly within settlements; and
- b. Sustaining the character of the countryside and rural communities.

5. Infrastructure and Natural Resources

- a. Support for infrastructure which achieves the social and economic aims of the Greenbelt and the proposed Growth Plan while seeking to minimize environmental impacts;
- b. Recognition of the benefits of protecting renewable and non-renewable natural resources within the Greenbelt; and
- c. Provision for the availability and sustainable use of those resources critical to the region's social, environmental, economic and growth needs.