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**Subject:** Growing the Greenbelt Environmental Registry of Ontario Posting

**Report to:** Planning and Economic Committee

**Report date:** Wednesday, March 10, 2021

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## Recommendations

1. That Report PDS 18-2021 and its appendices **BE RECEIVED** for information; and
2. That this report and its appendices **BE CIRCULATED** to the Local Area Municipalities, and the Local Area Municipalities consider identifying additional lands and Urban River Valleys for Greenbelt protection, responding directly to the Province through the Environmental Registry of Ontario.

## Key Facts

- The purpose of this report is to respond to the Province's proposal "*Consultation on growing the size of the Greenbelt*". As part of this exercise, the Province is seeking feedback through six discussion questions.
- The Province's proposal is premised around 3 key areas:
  - An opportunity for Local Municipalities to identify additional Greenbelt expansions including Urban River Valley considerations;
  - Seeking feedback on balancing other Provincial priorities with Greenbelt expansions.
  - A Greenbelt expansion study area for the Paris Galt Moraine (located outside of Niagara Region);
- The proposal will not consider removals from the Greenbelt Plan area;
- As part of the 2015-2017 Provincial Plan review, Niagara Region and its local municipalities identified over 1400 hectares of additional lands for Greenbelt protection, resulting in Greenbelt expansions in Thorold and Grimsby.

- Responses on the current proposal are due to the Province on or before April 19, 2021.
- Niagara Region staff comments in response to discussion questions are included as Appendix I.

## **Financial Considerations**

There are no financial implications associated with this report.

## **Analysis**

### Background

The Greenbelt Plan was first introduced through Provincial legislation in 2004. In Niagara, the Greenbelt Plan primarily introduced protections for Specialty Crop areas in north Niagara.

In 2013, the Province released Amendment 1 to the Greenbelt Plan, introducing the concept of an Urban River Valley (URV). The URV designation serves as a linkage between interior Greenbelt lands, urban areas, and Lake Ontario.

The 12 Mile Creek within the St. Catharines urban area was one of the first URVs. Prior to the URV designation, the 12 Mile Creek watershed was partially identified through the Specialty Crop designation with identification of the creek ending at the St. Catharines urban area boundary.

In 2015, at the start of the Province's 10-year review of the Greenbelt Plan, the Region and its local municipalities identified approximately 1,400 hectares (3,459 acres) of new land for Greenbelt protection. When the 2017 Greenbelt Plan was released, these lands were added to the Greenbelt's Protected Countryside designation, making Niagara one of only 3 regions to identify additional lands for Greenbelt protection.

### Current ERO Proposal

On February 17, 2021, the Province released a proposal seeking feedback through 6 discussion questions on growing the Greenbelt. This proposal was shared on the Environmental Registry of Ontario (ERO).

The primary focus of this proposal is the identification of a study area for the Paris Galt Moraine, located outside of Niagara.

Additionally, the proposal asks about identification of additional lands that can support the growth of the Greenbelt. It also notes opportunities to identify new URVs or to extend current URV designated lands beyond the current 60 metre buffer, where public land ownership exists beyond the 60 metre threshold (such as government owned land, parks and conservation lands).

Niagara Region Staff prepared a response to the Province's discussion questions, attached as Appendix I. Staff support the Province's objectives with this proposal. A summary of Staff response is as follows:

- Identification of Regional and local municipal Greenbelt projects that would benefit from additional Provincial support, such as agricultural irrigation;
- Support for local municipalities to explore additional Greenbelt land and URV designations;
- Exploring opportunities to prioritize parkland expansions in the Greenbelt, including use of Provincial and Federal lands;
- Highlighting the Region's draft Official Plan work that targets growth to settlement areas, with intensification rates that will meet or exceed provincial targets.

While the ERO proposal provides a feedback mechanism for local municipalities to identify lands for consideration, the process to move municipally-identified additions forward is outlined in section 5.6.1.4 of the Greenbelt Plan. The policies indicate that to consider local municipal requests, the Province shall be guided by criteria developed for municipalities. These criteria include:

- Providing supportive Council resolutions;
- Demonstrating how the proposed lands connect physically or functionally to the Greenbelt;
- Demonstrating that a proposal would complement the Growth Plan and support other related provincial initiatives such as the Great Lakes Strategy and Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan.

To support this ERO proposal and to identify additional areas that could benefit from Greenbelt protection:

- In February, Regional Staff circulated the ERO posting to all local area Planning Directors and indicated that any areas for expansion identified by the local municipalities should be communicated directly with the Province and shared with the Region.
- Regional Staff comments have been prepared (Appendix I). These will be shared with local municipalities and the Province after receipt of this Report.

Following the April 19, 2021 commenting period, if areas are identified by the local municipalities for Greenbelt or URV expansion, the Region can coordinate with the local municipality to navigate the Greenbelt Plan amendment process as required.

### **Alternatives Reviewed**

Council could chose not to circulate this Report to the local municipalities. This option is not recommended since the Region regularly works cooperatively, with open communication, with local municipalities on Greenbelt-related matters.

### **Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities**

N/A

### **Other Pertinent Reports**

N/A

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**Prepared by:**  
Erik Acs, MCIP, RPP  
Manager of Community Planning  
Planning and Development Services

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**Recommended by:**  
Doug Giles, BES, MUP  
Acting Commissioner  
Planning and Development Services

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**Submitted by:**

Ron Tripp, P.Eng.  
Acting Chief Administrative Officer

*This report was reviewed by Isaiah Banach, Acting Director of Community and Long Range Planning.*

**Appendices**

Appendix 1

Staff Response to Provincial Discussion Questions

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