

**ERO Posting: 019-3136 - Consultation on growing the size of the Greenbelt**

Provincial discussion questions:

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

Niagara Region Staff Response: As this study area is located outside of Niagara Region, staff have not reviewed the Paris Galt Moraine component of this proposal.

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

Niagara Region Staff Response: As this study area is located outside of Niagara Region, staff have not reviewed the Paris Galt Moraine component of this proposal.

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

Niagara Region Staff Response: Regional staff note that the 12 Mile Creek in St. Catharines was one of the first Greenbelt Urban River Valleys (URV) added to the Plan following Amendment 1 to the Greenbelt Plan in 2013. In addition, the City of St. Catharines, with the Region's support, has encouraged the URV vision by creating opportunities for recreational, cultural and tourist amenities in the 12 Mile Creek URV which support the Greenbelt Plan.

Regional staff remain in favour of the URV designation and will support local municipalities who wish to identify new URV's or additional URV lands beyond the current 60 metre threshold for Greenbelt consideration.

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

Niagara Region Staff Response: In support of the Province's 10-year review of the Greenbelt Plan which occurred between 2015 and 2017, the Region and its member municipalities worked collectively to identify an additional 1400 hectares (3459 acres) of area to expand Greenbelt protection. When the updated Greenbelt Plan (2017) was released, Niagara was one of only 3 Greenbelt regions with new land added to support the growth of the Greenbelt.

The Region's member municipalities put considerable effort into identifying and justifying new lands for inclusion in the Greenbelt Plan during the Province's 10-year

review in 2017. As the Region and several of its member municipalities are currently working on Provincial Plan conformity, including refinements of the agricultural land base, the identification of additional lands beyond those already added has not occurred. The Region is supportive of the Greenbelt Plan, and supports its member municipalities in the pursuit of identifying additional lands that could benefit from Greenbelt protection.

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

Niagara Region Staff Response: This question is premised on the identification of 4 topics identified in the ERO posting as priorities: Growth Management, Infrastructure, Agriculture, and Natural Heritage & Water Resource Systems. Balancing priorities should be based on local considerations. Regional and local governments are best equipped to balance Provincially-identified priorities, with support from the Provincial and Federal government.

Growth Management & Infrastructure: As most of Niagara's Greenbelt land is designated Specialty Crop area, considerations for growth and non-agricultural infrastructure are predetermined through Specialty Crop policies. The draft work on Niagara's Official Plan will targeted growth in its settlement areas, with intensification rates that will meet or exceed provincial targets.

Agriculture: While the Greenbelt Plan has enabling policies that support the agricultural system, the Region and member municipalities have identified a need for agricultural irrigation to support continued farm viability, especially in the tender fruit and grape area. The Ministry of Agriculture Food and Rural Affairs has offered technical assistance with this initiative; however, prioritizing funding for agricultural infrastructure is important to combat the loss of specialty crop production.

Natural Heritage: Regional staff support the Province's identification of natural heritage and water resource systems as a priority item. This is consistent with the Region's position on these two important topics for our own municipal comprehensive review, where the natural environment has been identified as a key priority. As past and current participants in Greenbelt Foundation grant programs, the Province's commitment of \$12M over 3 years to further support the Greenbelt Foundation will continue to support the identification and protection of Niagara's natural environment.

**Question 6: Are there other priorities that should be considered?**

Niagara Region Staff Response: In terms of additional areas for prioritization, Section 3.3 of the Greenbelt Plan speaks to parkland, open space and trails. Regional staff

would identify parkland as a priority topic to complement the Province's growth related priorities.

The current Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of outdoor public spaces. Prioritizing the identification and/or conversion of Provincially and Federally held lands for park use would support the objectives of the Greenbelt Plan and serve as an important component of complete communities, providing benefits to support environmental protection and climate change adaptation and mitigation.