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### **REPORT OF THE GREENBELT TASK FORCE ADVICE AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE MINISTER OF MUNICIPAL AFFAIRS AND HOUSING, AUGUST 2004**

*(Regional Council at its meeting on September 23, 2004 amended this Clause to request Staff to provide a report to the October 6, 2004 Planning and Economic Development Committee regarding the expansion of the Rouge Park in south east York Region, north of Steeles Avenue in the Town of Markham.)*

The Planning and Economic Development Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendations contained in the following report, August 22, 2004, from the Commissioner of Planning and Development Services:

#### **1. RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that:

1. This report be received for information purposes and that Regional staff continue to monitor and provide input to this process.
2. The Region's previous comments (Clause 10 of Report 6 of Regional Planning and Economic Development Committee) adopted by Regional Council at its meeting of June 24, 2004 be forwarded along with this report to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing and his staff for consideration during drafting of the Greenbelt Protection Plan.
3. This report be forwarded to area municipalities in York Region and adjacent Regions.

#### **2. PURPOSE**

The purpose of this report is to advise Committee and Council of the report of the Greenbelt Task Force entitled *Advice and Recommendations to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing* dated August 2004. A copy of the Task Force report is appended as *Attachment 1*.

#### **3. BACKGROUND**

In December 2003, the Government introduced the *Greenbelt Protection Act, 2003* in the Legislature. The purpose of this Act was to give the Province time to study and establish a permanent Greenbelt in South Central Ontario. This Act received Royal Assent on June 24, 2004 and will lapse on December 16, 2004.

In February 2004, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing established the Greenbelt Task Force, charged with providing recommendations on how to identify lands for protection from development in order to preserve for current and future generations:

- Our natural heritage
- Sensitive environmental areas
- Vital agricultural communities
- Non-renewable natural resources
- Opportunities for tourism, recreation and experiencing cultural heritage.

The Task Force met throughout the late winter and spring of this year and in May released a discussion paper before holding a series of 6 public hearings and a number of stakeholder workshops. On August 20, 2004, the Greenbelt Task Force delivered its recommendations to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. According to the Report to the Minister, the Task Force heard from more than 1200 people and received more than 1,000 submissions, including one from York Region, in the form of Clause 10 of Report 6 of the Regional Planning and Economic Development Committee adopted by Regional Council at its meeting of June 24, 2004.

#### **4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS**

The June Report of Commissioner of Planning and Development Services provided a number of specific recommendations to the Task Force. These recommendations are appended as *Attachment 2* to this report and compared to the Task Force recommendations. These comments are still valid and should be forwarded to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing and his staff to be considered during drafting of the Greenbelt Protection Plan

The Task Force report establishes the broad principles for the delineation of the Greenbelt, but has not attempted to place “lines on a map” preferring to leave that and the drafting of the actual Greenbelt Plan to Provincial Ministries.

A total of seven areas of recommendations were discussed in the Task Force report with a number of these having particular relevance to York Region based on the Region’s previous comments. These key recommendations involve the following issues:

- Principles for Defining the Greenbelt
- Use of a Systems Approach
- Agricultural Protection
- Transportation and Infrastructure
- Administration and Implementation

##### **4.1 Principles for Defining the Greenbelt**

The guiding principles for defining the greenbelt are framed under the headings of:

- Environmental protection
- Agricultural protection
- Transportation and infrastructure

- Natural resources
- Culture, recreation and tourism.

The Task Force has recommended that the Province observe the following principles in deciding what lands ought to be included:

- Lands that are already permanently protected by easements or owned by Charitable trusts or lands in Public ownership.
- Lands in which the Province has previously indicated an interest, including additions to the Niagara Escarpment, the tender fruit lands in Niagara and all portions of the Holland Marsh, speciality crop area.
- Some Provincially owned lands subject to suitability for inclusion.

In addition in discussing other issues areas, the Task Force also identifies other features which should become part of the Greenbelt including:

- Provincially Significant/Major natural heritage and hydrological features such as the Oak Ridges Moraine, Niagara Escarpment and the Rouge Valley and connections between these major features such as river valleys linking to lakes Ontario and Simcoe.
- Potentially other features such as glacial lake shorelines.

Finally the Task Force recommends that the growth management initiatives and the greenbelt initiatives proceed simultaneously.

**Staff Comment:**

The Region has supported this overall direction, but notes that our comments to the Task Force in June 2004 identified that the greenbelt components are generally well defined in York Region and recommended that the Task Force also consider inclusion of additional areas where Provincial Policy requires strengthening, including wetlands off Moraine, the middle reaches of streams and tableland woodlots. It is recommended that the issues be sent to the Ministry for consideration supports this direction.

## **4.2 Systems approach to Environmental Protection**

The Task Force recommends that the greenbelt utilize a natural heritage systems approach to be developed in consultation with key stakeholders. This is similar to the systems approach used in the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan that recognizes the interrelationships between natural heritage, water resources, landform conservation and open space networks. Consultation prior to the Plan's preparation would also assist in determining the policies and land use that should be permitted in the natural heritage system.

**Staff Comment:**

Regional staff supports for this direction subject to consideration of additional components as noted in Staff Comments on Sub-section 4.1 above.

### **4.3 Agricultural Protection**

The Task Force has recommended that key agricultural lands (where clusters of farms exist that support local agriculture or niche market farming exists including the tender fruit lands in Niagara and the Holland Marsh) be identified for permanent protection within the Greenbelt. Determination of these key areas will utilize a combination of scientific evaluation of land, socio-economic factors including degree of fragmentation, and rural economic development and existing regional and local official plan designations. Further the Task Force recommends that in these key agricultural areas urban boundary expansions and residential severances be prohibited. In speciality crop areas, both urban boundary expansions and severances for all purposes should be prohibited.

Lastly, the Task Force has references the appointment of the Agricultural Advisory Team in June 2004 and provides a suggestion that the Team address issues surrounding agricultural viability including the need for complementary initiatives to land protection such as economic development, research and monitoring, promotion of agricultural easements and land trusts for farmers who participate in conservation activities.

#### **Staff Comment:**

The Region previously recommended that the Provincial Government make a firm commitment to take leadership in the implementation of the Agricultural Action Plan as soon as possible. The Task Force recommendations do not directly deal with this leaving the identifications of other initiatives to the special purpose Agricultural Advisory Team (AAT). The Region should consider submissions to the AAT regarding Agricultural Issues.

### **4.4 Transportation and Infrastructure**

The Task Force has recommended that Infrastructure generally not be located within the greenbelt unless a series of criteria can be met. The intent of the criteria is similar to the intent and terms of the Oak Ridges Moraine Plan within the addition of the Greenbelt vision and goals. One specific recommendation that has been added, and one which the Region recommended at least in part, is that where new services are proposed to co-locate with existing services consideration should be given to easing or streamlining the requirements for an environmental assessment.

#### **Staff Comment:**

The Region's previous comments and issues have not been addressed in a substantive manner. Infrastructure is always required to accommodate planned urban growth as included in the approved Regional Official Plan. Some progress has been made in the task Force recommendation to streamline the EA process where co-located infrastructure is proposed. Other Regional comments remain valid and should be forwarded to the Minister and his staff to be considered during drafting of the Greenbelt Protection Plan.

### **4.5 Administration and Implementation**

The Task Force has recommended that the Province develop legislation and a Plan that creates a permanent greenbelt linking existing policies governing the Niagara escarpment

Plan, Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan and other lands necessary to fulfill the goals and objectives of the greenbelt. The Greenbelt Plan should clearly identify greenbelt lands and make provisions for the passage of a regulation if such may be required. The Plan will be administered however by municipalities as opposed to a special purpose body and incorporated into municipal official plans.

In addition, and most importantly, the Task Force has recommended that the Province should allocate sufficient resources to assist municipalities with implementation.

**Staff Comment:**

The Task Force recommendations do not detail administration and implementation mechanisms. This will be the responsibility of the Minister and his staff. The Region's issues remain valid and should be forwarded to the Minister and his staff to be considered during drafting of the Greenbelt Protection Plan.

**4.6 Next Steps**

The Province is now responsible for reviewing the Task Force Report and for drafting a Plan for Greenbelt Protection. It is anticipated that a draft document may be available by late September or early October.

Further consultation with stakeholders, while recommended by the Task Force, has not been identified at this time. Given the anticipated lapsing of the *Greenbelt Protection Act, 2003* of December 16, 2004 and the Government's avowed intent to have a Plan in place by this time, further consultations may be limited. It is noted as well that the Region has also recommended in its review of the provincial growth management discussion paper *Places to Grow* (report on September 8, 2004 Planning and Economic Development Committee) that completion of the Greenbelt Plan should follow the creation and adoption of a Provincial Growth Plan.

Regional staff will continue to monitor and participate in the process and report to Committee and Council on an as needed basis.

**5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The Task Force has recommended that the Province allocate sufficient resources to assist municipalities in implementation. If the Province accepts these recommendations it will be a welcome change from the municipal experience and costs of implementation of such plans as the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan.

Regardless however, if the Provincial Plan must be incorporated into municipal planning documents, then Regional staff will proceed although the costs of implementation are unknown at this time.

## **6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT**

Area municipalities in the Region have received copies of the report of the Greenbelt Task Force and will be consulted by the province in the same manner as the Region as the process proceeds.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

The Greenbelt Task Force has provided series of recommendations to the Province regarding the Vision and Goals, Principles, and elements proposed for inclusion within the Greenbelt Protection Plan. The Province is now responsible for developing a Draft Greenbelt Protection Plan including a map on the basis of these recommendations. Many of the Region's previous comments remain valid (Clause 10 of Report 6 of the Regional Planning and Economic Development Committee) and should be forwarded again to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing and his staff for consideration during drafting of the Greenbelt Protection Plan.

The Province is expected to released a draft Greenbelt Protection Plan in the fall and have a Plan approved before the *Greenbelt Protection Act, 2003* lapses in mid December 2004.

Regional staff will continue to monitor and provide input to this process and report to Committee and Council on an as needed basis.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

*(A copy of the attachments referred to in the foregoing has been forwarded to each Member of Regional Council with the September 8, 2004 Planning and Economic Development Committee Agenda and is also on file in the Regional Clerk's office.)*