



Ontarians have come to value the Greenbelt since it was created in February 2005. It protects 1.8 million acres of environmentally sensitive and agricultural land around the Greater Golden Horseshoe. Growing the Greenbelt can do even more to improve Ontarians' quality of life.

In March and April 2008, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing consulted on draft criteria to be used to consider potential municipal requests to grow the Greenbelt. Based on this advice, the Ontario government has put in place criteria to assess requests from regional, county and single-tier governments to expand the Greenbelt.

This booklet provides some background information about the Greenbelt and outlines the criteria and process that the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, in consultation with partner ministries, will use to consider municipal requests to expand the existing Greenbelt.

THE GREENBELT ACT AND PLAN

The Greenbelt Plan and Greenbelt boundary were established under the Greenbelt Act, 2005. The act allows only the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to propose amendments to the plan. Only the Lieutenant Governor on the recommendation of Cabinet can approve such amendments.



Decisions on planning applications must conform with the Greenbelt Plan. Municipalities are also required to bring their planning documents (e.g. official plans) into conformity with the plan.

The act requires a comprehensive policy review of the Greenbelt Plan every 10 years. The review must be co-ordinated with the reviews of the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan and the Niagara Escarpment Plan. The first 10-year review is to take place by 2015.

The act also required the government to create the Greenbelt Council, an advisory body to the Minister on Greenbelt matters. The Greenbelt Council provides advice to the Minister on both the 10-year review and any proposed amendments to the plan.

The criteria for growing the Greenbelt do not replace the 10-year review or limit the ability of the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to propose any other amendments to the plan. Amendments to the plan would follow the process outlined in the act.



What is the Greenbelt?

Ontario's Greenbelt is an area of permanently protected green space, farmland, communities, forests, wetlands and watersheds. The Greenbelt protects environmentally sensitive land and farmland in Ontario's Greater Golden Horseshoe area from urban development.

In addition to providing agricultural and environmental protection, the Greenbelt contains important natural resources and supports a wide range of recreational, tourism and cultural opportunities.

The Greenbelt includes the Oak Ridges Moraine, the Niagara Escarpment and land that is known as "Protected Countryside" that lies at the heart of the Greater Golden Horseshoe.

The Greenbelt is a cornerstone of the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, Ontario's over-arching strategy for managing growth for the area. The Greenbelt Plan identifies where major urban growth cannot take place. The Growth Plan focuses growth where it makes sense to revitalize our urban areas, away from environmentally sensitive and prime agricultural areas.

PROCESS

This booklet outlines the Province's approach to consider requests from regional, county and single-tier municipalities that want to grow the Greenbelt. The process provides an opportunity for municipalities to identify areas that would become protected countryside by including them in the Greenbelt. The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, in partnership with other ministries, has developed criteria that will be used to evaluate such municipal requests to grow the Greenbelt.

In preparing a submission to grow the Greenbelt, municipalities need to demonstrate how they have addressed each of the criteria. They are encouraged to build on existing municipal resources and data such as official plan mapping. A request should include a detailed proposal and supporting information such as maps and reports. Municipalities considering proposing an expansion should initiate early discussions with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing before making a formal submission.

Staff from the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, and from partner ministries (Ministries of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs; Natural Resources; Energy and Infrastructure; Transportation; Environment; Tourism; Culture; Health Promotion; Aboriginal Affairs; Economic Development and Trade and Northern Development and Mines), are available to meet with municipalities to discuss their proposed submission to grow the Greenbelt.

Discussions may help to clarify existing Greenbelt policies and how those policies may apply to the proposed expansion area. Discussions could also include determining data and information needs, forms of engagement and possible refinements to the proposal that may be needed to demonstrate that the municipality has addressed the criteria.



Upon receiving a formal submission, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, with technical support from partner ministries, will review the submission to determine how the municipality has addressed all of the criteria. Based on this review, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing may initiate the process to amend the Greenbelt Plan.

Under the Greenbelt Act, 2005, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing is required to consult with affected public bodies including the Greenbelt Council, affected municipalities and the public on a proposed amendment before recommending it to Cabinet for approval. The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing may use a variety of ways to consult with key stakeholders and engage with Aboriginal communities on a proposed amendment to the Greenbelt Plan. This may include public meetings, one-on-one meetings, workshops or open house sessions. Information about a proposed amendment would be posted on the Environmental Bill of Rights Registry. Only the Lieutenant Governor, on the recommendation of Cabinet, can approve an amendment to the Greenbelt Plan.



PRINCIPLES

The criteria and the process to consider requests to grow the Greenbelt are based on the following principles:

- Reductions or deletions to the Greenbelt area will not be considered.
- Land in the Greenbelt will not be swapped or traded for land outside of the Greenbelt.
- Current Greenbelt Plan policies continue to apply and will not be changed.
- The mandated 10-year Greenbelt Plan review is not replaced. The plan's policies and mapping will be subject to a comprehensive review by 2015.
- The ability of the Minister to propose other amendments is not affected.
- The legislated Greenbelt Plan amendment process remains unchanged. Only the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing can propose amendments, and only the Lieutenant Governor, on the recommendation of Cabinet, can approve amendments.

"By allowing expansions to the Greenbelt, the McGuinty government is giving municipalities the power to protect valuable land in their communities. I encourage municipalities to seize this opportunity to safeguard Ontario's precious greenspace for generations to come." – Dr. Rick Smith, Environmental Defence

EXPANSION CRITERIA

The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing will consider municipal requests to grow the Greenbelt that address the following six criteria. The ultimate discretion rests with the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing as to whether an expansion proposal addresses the criteria.

1. Municipal Request

The request is from a regional, county or single-tier municipal government and is supported by a council resolution.

In a region or county, the lower-tier host municipality (or municipalities) in the proposed expansion area supports the request through a council resolution.

For regions and counties, a council resolution is needed from the upper-tier council as well as the lower-tier council of the host municipality (or municipalities) where the proposed expansion to the Greenbelt would be located. The submission should consider and build on existing municipal data and resources such as official plan mapping and policies. Municipalities will need to provide documentation and supporting rationale as to how they have addressed the criteria and are encouraged to work together in preparing a submission.

The municipality documents how it has addressed the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing's expectations for:

- *Engagement with the public, key stakeholders, and public bodies such as conservation authorities, including notification of affected landowners.*
- *Engagement with Aboriginal communities.*



Council will need to demonstrate what measures it has taken to engage the public, affected landowners, key stakeholder organizations and public bodies about growing the Greenbelt in its municipality. Considerations for engagement should build on the consultation process municipalities use for a comprehensive official plan amendment such as the five-year review of a municipal official plan.

The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing expects that engagement will occur early in the process and will include notifying all affected landowners, adjacent municipalities and the public. Engagement would also include notifying and working with public bodies such as local conservation authorities, the Niagara Escarpment Commission and key stakeholder organizations. Notification can be achieved by mail and supported by ads in local newspapers. Municipalities are encouraged to hold public open house(s) or meeting(s) to allow council to hear all viewpoints on the proposed expansion.

Council will also need to demonstrate how it has engaged Aboriginal communities. Sharing information

upfront and early in the process should be part of the municipality's regular business practices and can help build co-operative relationships and mutual respect. Initial considerations should include identifying Aboriginal communities who may have Aboriginal or treaty rights or other interests in the area under consideration for Greenbelt expansion.

There are a number of ways that municipalities can engage Aboriginal communities. Initial contact could be made through personal mail delivery with follow-up phone calls. Council should also work with Aboriginal communities to determine appropriate timing, methods and approaches for any proposed meetings to explain and discuss the process for growing the Greenbelt.

"The criteria represent an important step forward in the process of expanding the Greenbelt. I am of course pleased that the Ontario Government is responding to the Greenbelt Council's advice to commence development of criteria to expand the Greenbelt." – Dr. Robert Elgie, Chair, Greenbelt Council

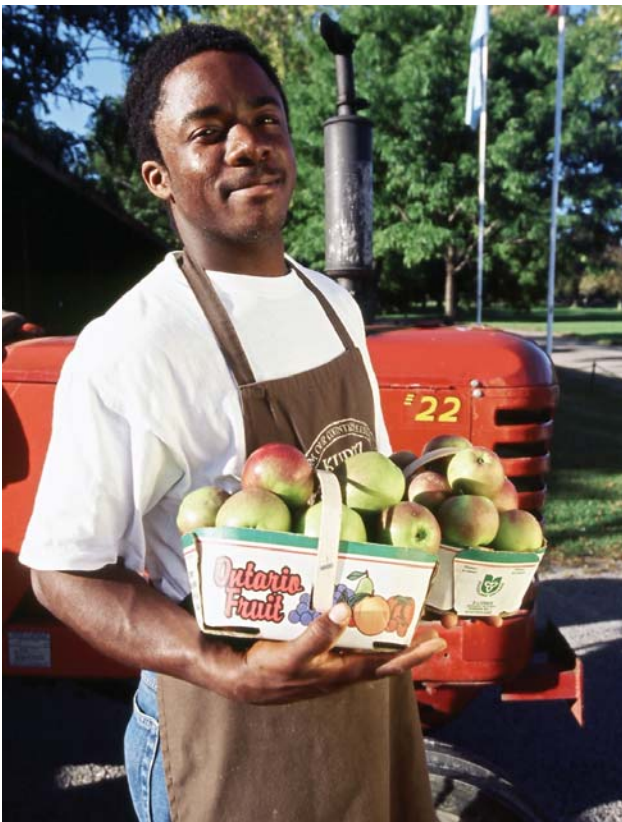
2. Additions to the Greenbelt

The request identifies a proposed expansion area that is adjacent to the Greenbelt or demonstrates a clear functional relationship to the Greenbelt area and how the Greenbelt Plan policies will apply.

Proposed additions to the Greenbelt should be connected to the existing Greenbelt area to add Protected Countryside areas to the Greenbelt Plan.

However, lands that are not immediately adjacent to the Greenbelt may also be considered for expansion where it can be demonstrated that there is a clear functional relationship to the Greenbelt.

A functional relationship is based on natural heritage, water resources or agriculture. For example, this could include the protection of headwaters, recharge areas and associated wetlands.



3. Embraces the Greenbelt Purpose

The request demonstrates how the proposed expansion area meets the intent of the vision and one or more of the goals of the Greenbelt Plan.

The Greenbelt Plan establishes its main purpose through its vision and goals. Municipal submissions to grow the Greenbelt need to demonstrate how the proposed expansion area meets the vision of the Greenbelt.

The Greenbelt plan aims to enhance urban and rural areas and overall quality of life in the Protected Countryside. While providing permanent agricultural and environmental protection, and supporting a strong agricultural and rural economy, the Greenbelt Plan also provides for a wide range of recreation, tourism and cultural opportunities. Municipal submissions to grow the Greenbelt need to demonstrate how the proposed expansion area meets one or more goals of the Greenbelt Plan.

A commitment to implement and support the existing policies of the Greenbelt Plan needs to be demonstrated. Changes to the existing policies of the Greenbelt will not be considered through this process.

Greenbelt 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.
- Provides for a diverse range of economic and social activities associated with rural communities, agriculture, tourism, recreation and resource uses.

Please refer to the Greenbelt Plan for more information on the Greenbelt's goals, available at www.greenbelt.ontario.ca

Greenbelt Goals

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

1. Agricultural protection
2. Environmental protection
3. Culture, recreation and tourism
4. Settlement areas
5. Infrastructure and natural resources

Please refer to the Greenbelt Plan for more information on the Greenbelt's goals.



4. Connections to Greenbelt Systems

One or more of the Greenbelt systems (Natural Heritage System, Agricultural System and Water Resource System) is identified and included in the proposed expansion area and their functional relationship to the existing Greenbelt system is demonstrated.

Municipal requests to grow the Greenbelt need to identify and include one or more of these systems in the proposed expansion area. The municipality will have to demonstrate a functional relationship between the proposed expansion area and one or more of the systems of the existing Greenbelt Plan.

The Greenbelt Plan includes a provincial-scale Agricultural System and Natural System that also

maintain connections to the broader agricultural and natural systems of southern Ontario. The Natural System is made up of a Natural Heritage System and a Water Resource System. The area identified for Greenbelt expansion must be based on the same provincial scale systems approach that was used in the Protected Countryside of the Greenbelt Plan.

The Agricultural System is made up of specialty crop areas that include the Holland Marsh and the Niagara Peninsula tender fruit and grape areas, prime agricultural areas and rural areas. The Agricultural System is connected both functionally and economically to agriculture beyond the existing Greenbelt.

The Natural Heritage System includes natural heritage features and areas linked by natural corridors necessary to maintain biological and geological diversity, natural functions, viable populations of indigenous species and

ecosystems. The Water Resource System is made up of both ground and surface water features and their associated functions, such as primary recharge, headwater and discharge areas. These provide the water resources necessary to sustain healthy aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems and human drinking water sources.

"CIELAP strongly supports the Provincial Government's action on developing criteria to assess municipal requests to expand the Greenbelt. Growing Ontario's Greenbelt will strengthen the protection of valuable agricultural and environmentally sensitive lands." – Anne Mitchell, Executive Director, Canadian Institute for Environmental Law and Policy.

Building the Greenbelt by Layers

The process of building the Greenbelt during 2004 and 2005 involved extensive consultation and collaboration. The Greenbelt Task Force, an advisory group, conducted public meetings and reported back to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing in August 2004. The Greenbelt Plan was drafted based on the task force's recommendations and advice. For more information on those recommendations, please review the task force's report "Toward a Golden Horseshoe Greenbelt" at www.mah.gov.on.ca/GreenbeltTaskForce.

The provincial Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe was developed at the same time as the Greenbelt Plan to identify where growth should take place and to reduce development pressures on rural and agricultural areas.

The Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan and Niagara Escarpment Plan form the backbone of the Greenbelt. The Greenbelt's Natural Heritage System includes and builds on the natural heritage systems in the moraine and the escarpment.

The final Greenbelt area was determined by identifying a natural heritage system and defining an agricultural system. Together, these components form the Protected Countryside of the Greenbelt. The government also considered the amount of land required to accommodate anticipated growth.

The Natural Heritage System identifies major core areas containing high concentrations of natural features and linking areas that ecologically connect the core areas. Major valley corridors of rivers flowing from the Oak Ridges Moraine and the Niagara Escarpment also provide links from the Greenbelt to Lake Ontario.

The Agricultural System was identified based on a number of factors, including the Greenbelt Land Evaluation Area Review study, the existing pattern of agriculturally protected lands set out in municipal official plans and a consideration of projected future growth patterns. This method uses a scoring system and considers a number of potential factors such as soils, climate, productivity and land fragmentation. Studies were also done to identify two Specialty Crop Areas: the Niagara Peninsula tender fruit and grape area, and the Holland Marsh.



5. Complements the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe

A municipality's request to expand the Greenbelt may be considered by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing while the municipality is engaged in its associated Growth Plan conformity exercise. The proposed area for expansion cannot impede the implementation of the Growth Plan. The municipality must demonstrate how the expansion area supports the goals, objectives and targets of both the Greenbelt Plan and the Growth Plan.

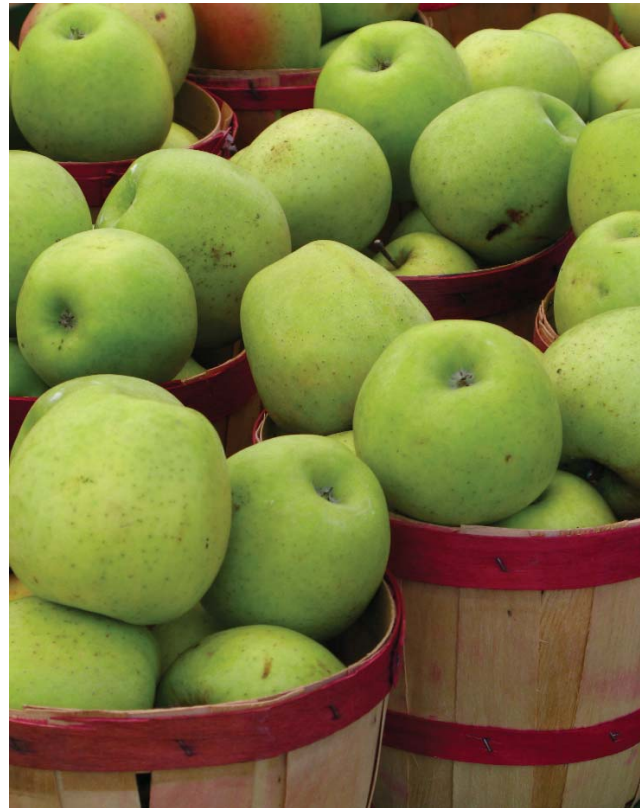
Expansions to the Greenbelt will be considered for areas that are outside of existing urban settlement areas. An exception may be considered for major natural heritage systems that are located within existing urban settlement areas. The natural heritage system must be designated within the municipal official plan.

The Growth Plan sets out a framework for managing growth and revitalizing existing urban communities in the Greater Golden Horseshoe. It also steers growth away from environmentally sensitive and prime agricultural areas. The Greenbelt Plan identifies where major urban growth cannot take place.

Municipalities are required to bring their official plans into conformity with the Growth Plan by June, 2009. A municipality may initiate a request to grow the Greenbelt at the same time as it is undertaking its Growth Plan conformity exercise. However, it must demonstrate that the Greenbelt expansion area supports the goals, objectives and targets of both the Growth Plan and the Greenbelt Plan. This includes

addressing how its future growth needs will be met and how the Greenbelt expansion complements the municipality's Growth Plan conformity exercise.

Proposed expansions to the Greenbelt should be outside of urban settlement areas designated in municipal official plans. An exception may be considered for major natural heritage systems that are designated as part of an urban settlement area and a significant connection to the Greenbelt area can be demonstrated. This would not include lands that have been designated for public parks, or active recreation uses (e.g. sports fields) that have been approved as part of an urban community.



6. Timing and Relationship to Other Provincial Initiatives

A municipality's request to expand the Greenbelt may be considered by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing while complementary provincial initiatives are being developed.

The request has to demonstrate that the proposed expansion area will not undermine provincial interests, or the planning or implementation of complementary provincial initiatives (e.g. Source Protection Plans under the Clean Water Act, 2006, Metrolinx's Regional Transportation Plan, proposed Lake Simcoe Protection Strategy.)

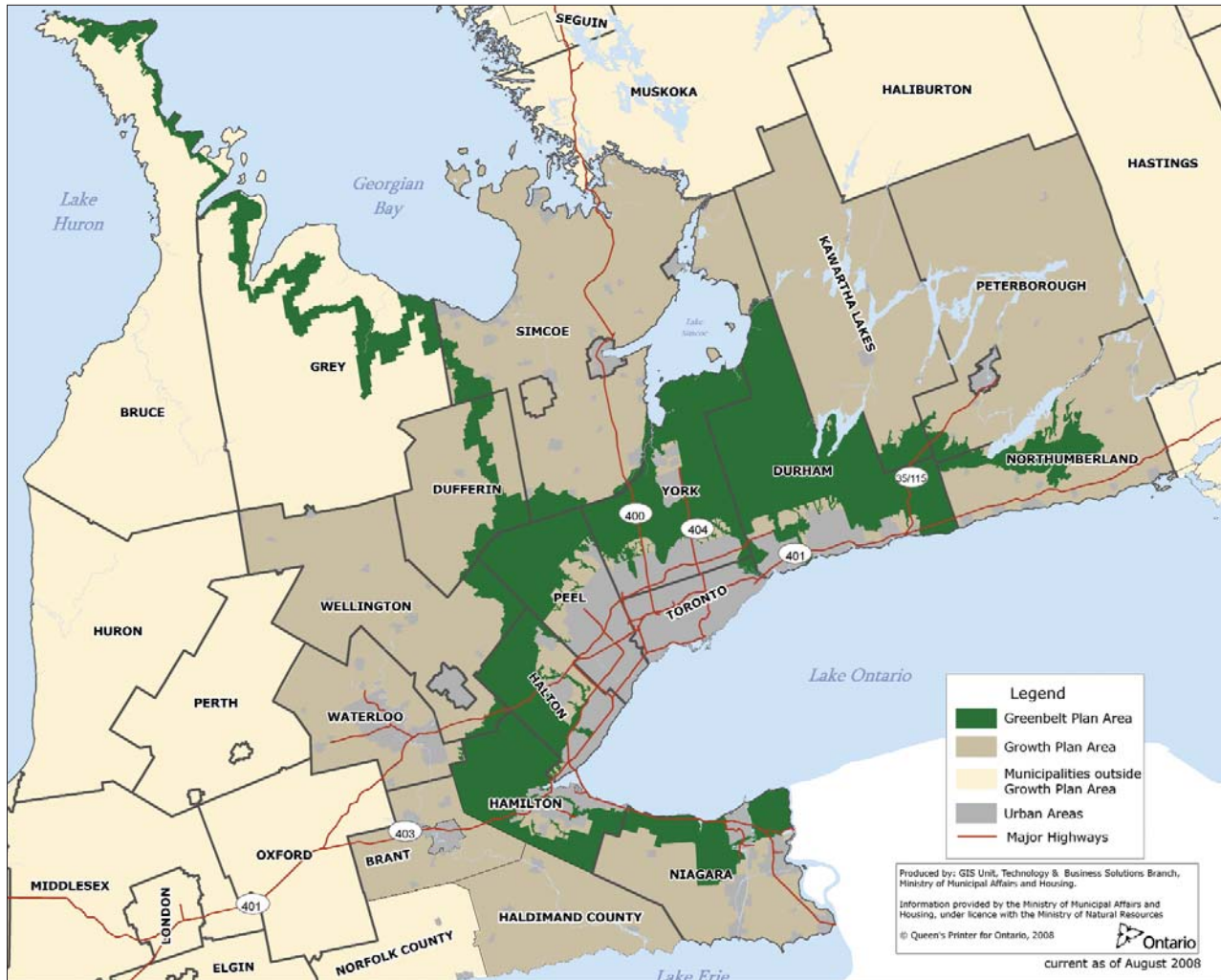
There are a number of provincial initiatives currently affecting the Greater Golden Horseshoe, including broader transportation/transit planning and protection of water resources. Some of these provincial initiatives include Source Protection Plans under the Clean Water Act, 2006, Metrolinx's Regional Transportation Plan, the Ministry of Transportation's planning, design and construction projects and the proposed Lake Simcoe Protection Strategy.

Municipal requests to grow the Greenbelt will need to identify the relationship to relevant provincial initiatives and demonstrate that the proposed expansion would complement and support them, and would not impede their planning or implementation.

"The Oak Ridges Moraine Foundation welcomes the Province's effort to provide Ontarians with the opportunity to further protect our significant natural spaces through this Growing the Greenbelt initiative. As a key geological landform within the Greenbelt, the Oak Ridges Moraine's significant ecological features and functions will be further strengthened."

– Debbe Crandall, Chair Oak Ridges Moraine Foundation

Greater Golden Horseshoe Greenbelt



Greenbelt Facts

- Total area of protected land in the Golden Horseshoe Greenbelt is 1.8 million acres – an area larger than Prince Edward Island.
- Includes about 1 million acres of protected land, known as the Protected Countryside, in addition to the land protected by the Niagara Escarpment Plan and the Oak Ridges Moraine Plan.
- Extends 325 kilometres from the eastern end of the Oak Ridges Moraine near Rice Lake, to the Niagara River in the west. This is almost the direct distance between New York City and Washington D.C., 328 km (204 miles).
- Reaches 80 kilometres at its widest point from the mouth of the Rouge River to the northern tip of Durham Region.
- Includes about 535,000 acres in the Protected Countryside's natural system and provides full protection for about three-quarters of the Greenbelt's lakes, wetlands and forests. The rest of the natural heritage system within the Greenbelt is protected by the Oak Ridges Moraine and Niagara Escarpment Plans.
- Protects the headwaters of all major watersheds in the western Greater Toronto Area that were not protected by the Niagara Escarpment or Oak Ridges Moraine plans.
- Permanently protects about 100,000 acres of Niagara Peninsula tender fruit and grape specialty crop areas and the entire Holland Marsh specialty crop area of over 15,000 acres, located in York Region and Simcoe County. This is more than twice the size of the agricultural lands in California protected by the Napa Valley Land Trust.

CONTACT INFORMATION :

Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing
14th Floor, 777 Bay Street
Toronto, ON M5G 2E5
Phone: 416-585-6014
Fax: 416-585-6870

MORE INFORMATION :

For more information on the Greenbelt and how it was built, visit:

Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing - Greenbelt
www.greenbelt.ontario.ca
Greenbelt Council
www.mah.gov.on.ca/greenbeltcouncil

OTHER RESOURCES |

For more information on supporting and complementary programs and initiatives, visit:

Ministry of Natural Resources
www.mnr.gov.on.ca

Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure – Places to Grow
www.placestogrow.ca

Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs
www.omafra.gov.on.ca

Ministry of the Environment
www.ene.gov.on.ca

Ministry of Transportation
www.mto.gov.on.ca

Ministry of Tourism
www.tourism.gov.on.ca

Ministry of Culture
www.culture.gov.on.ca

MetroLinx – Greater Toronto Transportation Authority
www.metrolinx.com

Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing

ISBN 978-1-4249-7530-3 (PDF)
ISBN 978-1-4249-7529-7 (Print)

© Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2008
5M/ 08/08

Disponible en français sous le titre
Une ceinture de verdure croissante