

REPORT

REPORT TO: Mayor Bonnette and Members of Council

REPORT FROM: Keith Hamilton, Planner - Policy

DATE: March 17, 2021

REPORT NO.: PD-2021-0020

RE: Provincial Consultation on Growing the Greenbelt

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT Report No. PD-2021-0020, dated March 17, 2021, regarding the Provincial Consultation on Growing the Greenbelt, be received;
AND FURTHER THAT Council endorse comments, attached as Appendix 1 to this report, to be submitted to the Province in advance of the commenting deadline of April 19, 2021;
AND FURTHER THAT a copy of this report be forwarded to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, the Region of Halton, the Local Municipalities of Burlington, Milton and Oakville, Conservation Halton, Credit Valley Conservation, and the Grand River Conservation Authority.

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT:

The purpose of this report is to:

- Provide an overview of the Province's Consultation on Growing the Greenbelt; and,
- Provide an overview of proposed comments to be submitted by Town staff to the Province on the matter.

BACKGROUND:

1.0 Provincial Consultation on Growing the Greenbelt

On February 17, 2021 the Province posted its proposed 'consultation on growing the Greenbelt' on the Environmental Registry of Ontario (ERO) website (<https://ero.ontario.ca/notice/019-3136>) for public review. The deadline for comments is set for April 19, providing a 61-day window for all those interested. Feedback is being

sought by the Province to expand and enhance the quality of the Greenbelt Plan Area, with a focus on:

- Groundwater resources within the Paris Galt Moraine study area (see Appendix 2); and,
- Adding, expanding, and further protecting Urban River Valleys.

1.1 Principles for Growing the Greenbelt

As part of the review, the Province has identified the following requirements when considering any possible expansion to the current Plan area:

- No consideration for Plan area removals or land exchanges;
- All potential expansions will be based on existing Greenbelt policies;
- All potential expansions must support the current Greenbelt Plan vision and objectives;
- All potential expansions must follow the existing Plan amendment process;
- All potential expansions must connect to the existing Plan area; and,
- All potential expansions must consider impacts on existing Provincial priorities, including those set out in the Provincial Policy Statement and Growth Plan.

1.2 Focus Areas

The Paris Galt Moraine is a large area of land running approximately from Brantford in southwestern Ontario northeast towards Caledon. Key characteristics of moraines are sand and gravel deposits that help protect and recharge groundwater systems, including aquifers. The Paris Galt Moraine contains aquifers which provide drinking water to many communities in the surrounding area.

The 'Initial Focus Area' identified by the Province for consultation (see Appendix 2) includes the Paris Galt Moraine, existing Greenbelt Plan Area, urban areas, and pockets of agricultural land outside the Greenbelt. This represents a larger area of land, from which the Province is seeking to delineate a 'Study Area' for growing the Greenbelt.

The 'Urban River Valley' (URV) is an existing designation in the Greenbelt Plan, protecting rivers and wetlands systems (and adjacent publicly-owned land) often surrounded by built up areas. There are currently 21 URVs identified in the Greenbelt Plan Area which help connect to the Great Lakes. In Halton Hills, parts of Silver Creek (Hungry Hollow, extending into Georgetown), Black Creek (Stewarttown), and Credit River (running north through Glen Williams) currently hold this designation. This URV system is largely designated Greenlands in the Town's Official Plan and subject to policies that strive to preserve and protect the natural environment.

1.3 Consideration for other Provincial Priorities

Notwithstanding the need to expand and enhance the Greenbelt, Provincial consultation must also consider other priorities, as set out in existing plans and policies, including:

- Growth Management – potential expansion must not compromise the need to conform with the Growth Plan;
- Natural Heritage and Water Resource Systems – the Greenbelt must continue to align with other Provincial Plan policies, ensuring its connection with other systems outside the Plan area;
- Agriculture – continued support for existing agricultural systems; and,
- Infrastructure – upgrades and expansions to existing public infrastructure will continue to be permitted and accounted for.

2.0 Previous Town Consultation on Greenbelt Expansion

In November of 2004, through staff report PD-2004-0060 Town staff recommended the Greenbelt Plan Area be expanded to include lands in Halton Hills west of Sixth Line (see Appendix 3). This recommendation was made in consultation with the Region of Halton and Area Municipalities on the basis that these lands would not be required to accommodate the, then, forecasted population for 2031.

In January of 2005, the recommendation made in PD-2004-0060 was rescinded through Council Resolution No. 2005-0023. This was done on the basis that insufficient consultation with the local farming community was completed due to a narrow public consultation window provided by the Province in 2004, and that existing Regional and Town Official Plan policies on the lands in question provided adequate protection of Prime Agricultural land and Greenlands.

In February of 2008, the Province released a Growing the Greenbelt consultation paper. The purpose of this document was to gather feedback on proposed criteria to guide future Greenbelt expansion requests. These criteria are largely reflected in the current consultation on 'Growing the Greenbelt'. Town staff, as part of the Halton Area Planning Partnership (HAPP) developed a Joint Submission to the Province in response. This submission, as summarized in PD-2008-0032, largely supported the criteria as proposed, while noting the following:

- The need to consider regional-scale Natural Heritage Systems, in addition to Provincial systems, when considering expansion; and,
- The need for clarity on the request that proposed expansions must not compromise other expansion land needs (i.e. urban and employment) to 2031 and beyond.

In April of 2018, Town staff reported on the Province's 'Protecting Water for Future Generations: Growing the Greenbelt in the Outer Ring' policy proposal, as outlined in report ADMIN-2018-0017 (see Appendix 4). While noting the proposed 'outer ring' study

area did not include any lands within the Town, staff supported this study area as it was presented, with no further additions. The report also addressed the Region of Halton's February 2018 request to expand the study into the 'whitebelt area' of Halton Hills. Town staff did not support this request based on the following:

- A lack of public engagement locally, contrary to the principles embedded in the Town's Public Engagement Charter;
- The request would preempt the Region's Municipal Comprehensive Review, and as such is premature until the Regional Official Plan Review is finalized;
- Significant expansion into the Town's 'whitebelt' area would limit our flexibility to continue to grow at a moderate scale and pace with potential adverse impacts on the Town's fiscal health;
- The potential to compromise future expansion needs to the Premier Gateway Area; and,
- Lands in the 'whitebelt' area are already subject to a restrictive policy regime.

Halton Hills Council ultimately approved a recommendation from this report that it **did not** support the Region of Halton motion requesting an extension of the Greenbelt study area to include the 'whitebelt' lands.

COMMENTS:

1.0 Provincial Consultation – Discussion Questions

Included in the Environmental Registry of Ontario posting for this consultation, the Province has provided six discussion questions as a format for the public to provide comment. Specifically, these questions focus on:

- The extent and appropriateness of the study area for the Paris Galt Moraine;
- Enhancements, expansions, and additions of Urban River Valleys in the Greenbelt;
- Other opportunities to expand the Greenbelt; and,
- Balancing other Provincial priorities when considering Greenbelt expansion.

Appendix 1 to this report provides Town staff responses to the six consultation questions. These responses take into account Town positions taken in past Greenbelt consultations, while also acknowledging current needs, issues and challenges facing Halton Hills.

2.0 Consideration for Greenbelt Expansion in Halton Hills

The 'initial focus area' proposed by the Province through this consultation centres around the Paris Galt Moraine (see Appendix 2) and contains only a small amount of land in Halton Hills outside the current Greenbelt Plan Area. However, Question 4 (in Appendix 1) asks whether additional lands outside this focus area should be considered.

In drafting a response to this question, Town staff considered responses in past Provincial consultations on expanding the Greenbelt. At this time, and consistent with what was set out in ADMIN-2018-0017, staff has similar concerns regarding whether additional lands should be incorporated into the Greenbelt. Such a course of action would pre-empt the on-going Regional Official Plan review and could not be informed by robust consultation within the allotted commenting deadline. To that end, consideration for growing the Greenbelt in Halton Hills should wait until the completion of the ROPR, after which a more fulsome review can be undertaken with appropriate time and resources for public consultation.

RELATIONSHIP TO STRATEGIC PLAN:

The Strategic Plan sets the Corporate Mission, Values and Priorities of the Town. This report relates to the value of Providing Responsive, Effective Municipal Government. Through participation in this Provincial review, Town staff is providing strong leadership in the effective and efficient delivery of municipal services, by providing input that reflects the interests of, and issues facing Halton Hills.

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

There is no financial impact associated with this report.

CONSULTATION:

Town staff consulted with other HAPP members, including Region, other Area Municipal, and Conservation Authority staff ahead of preparing this report.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT:

No public engagement was undertaken for this report.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS:

The Town is committed to implementing our Community Sustainability Strategy, Imagine Halton Hills. Doing so will lead to a higher quality of life.

The recommendation outlined in this report advances the Strategy's implementation.

This report supports the Environmental Health pillar of Sustainability. The potential inclusion of the Paris Galt Moraine in the Greenbelt would provide greater protection to water resource systems connected to those in Halton Hills. In summary the alignment of this report with the Community Sustainability Strategy is good.

COMMUNICATIONS:

A copy of this report will be forwarded to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, the Region of Halton, the Local Municipalities of Burlington, Milton and Oakville, Conservation Halton, Credit Valley Conservation and the Grand River Conservation Authority.

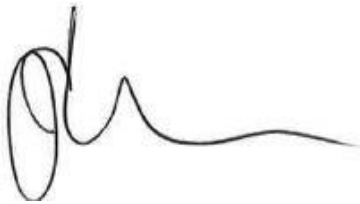
CONCLUSION:

This report has provided an overview of the Provincial Consultation on Growing the Greenbelt, and proposed discussion question responses to be submitted to the Province as part of the consultation. It is recommended that Council endorse the discussion question responses to be submitted to the Province ahead of the April 19 deadline.

Reviewed and Approved by,



Bronwyn Parker, Director of Planning Policy



John Linhardt, Commissioner of Planning and Development



Chris Mills, Acting Chief Administrative Officer