

Durham Conservation / Green Door Alliance Newsletter
December 2004

This newsletter updates members and Patrons on recent activities of the Durham Conservation Association, (DCA), and its sister organization the Green Door Alliance, (GDA) and on related issues of interest to our supporters.

The Provincial Greenbelt Plan

We have been actively participating in this process and submitted comments to the Greenbelt Task Force in July (they are available at www.greendooralliance.ca). In October the Municipal Affairs Ministry produced a greenbelt Draft Plan and have just completed a series of invitation only workshops as well as public presentations to explain it and get input. Again we have attended these workshops and provided comment and will also be submitting more comments before the December 12 comment deadline.

Attached is a map of the Draft Greenbelt Plan Area along with recommended additions highlighted in red suggested by Ontario Nature – additions which we support. (For more info see www.greenbelt.ontario.ca or www.ontarionature.org)

At a general level we are highly supportive of the greenbelt initiative – an initiative that covers some one million acres. Some 350,000 acres fall under the Moraine and Escarpment Plans, and in these areas the existing planning framework will remain essentially unchanged.

Among other things we are delighted that the Duffin Rouge Agricultural Preserve forms part of the area designated for protection; that estate residential will not be allowed anywhere in the greenbelt; and that modest expansion of settlement area boundaries will only be considered at the 10 year review of the Plan - and only then if expansion is not on to prime Agricultural areas or into the Natural Heritage system. In addition no ‘big Pipe’ great lake sewer/water extensions would be allowed -only local sewer and water services.

However we do have concerns chief among them the following:

- that the Plan could encourage leapfrog development
- that prime farmland south of the Moraine and north of existing urban growth boundaries has been excluded from the greenbelt in order to satisfy perceived future growth needs. Including the red areas on the attached map in the greenbelt would help address these problems.

We hope as well that the Provincial Smart Growth and Plan Reform initiatives will also deal with this problem, (see below), and will result in the creation of firm urban growth boundaries along with further policies requiring municipalities to develop plans to build more compactly within these boundaries, not just continue to use greenfield as they have in the past and gain access to more of this prime farmland south of the Moraine when they want it. Without knowing the final form the smart growth and plan reform initiatives will take we remain uneasy.

It should be noted that recent discussion papers produced by Durham Planning indicate that Durham has sufficient land within existing boundaries to handle projected growth until the years 2026 – 2030. These studies point out as well that if densities more reflective of more mature urban areas were reached the land supply would last many years longer. Given this, to designate additional areas for future growth may encourage speculation and dissuade policymakers from tackling intensification and redevelopment.

Other concerns.

- The implementation process seems incredibly rushed and untidy; a few more months should be added to the implementation to enable the Municipalities to work with the Province to see if some of their concerns can be accommodated without impairing the overall intent of the Plan.
- Transition rules governing current development applications are unclear, (applications are grandfathered but the Province reserves the right to intervene).
- The Greenbelt Plan will use the same mapping of prime agricultural areas as presently included in Official Plans with one difference – municipalities will be given an opportunity to review the prime farmland and rural designations when they bring their plans into conformity with the Greenbelt Plan. We hope this will not be significantly used to reclassify prime farmland.

Other Provincial initiatives, (Smart Growth, Plan and OMB reform including Revision of the Provincial Policy Statement, (PPS) etc.

We have commented this summer on the Province's Growth Plan Discussion paper for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, as well as on a series of papers produced by the Province on OMB and Planning Act Reform, and on draft changes to the Provincial Policy Statement. (See GDA website for more detail))

Again we are generally supportive of these initiatives. However the Provincial Policy statement should be even further tightened up particularly as it relates to requiring municipalities to develop intensification plans as an integral part of their Official Plans. Regarding OMB reform we'd like to see OMB jurisdiction on matters of major planning importance greatly limited. As one example appeals to expand settlement area boundaries when the municipality is not in favour should not be allowed.

The Province is indicating it will produce a Draft Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe later in the winter followed by further consultations. We also expect to see the Province produce a revised Provincial Policy Statement around the same time. However OMB reform will not be addressed till later in 2005.

As mentioned earlier, the Greenbelt Plan, the Growth Plan and the Planning Framework revisions are all highly interconnected elements in developing a new land use regime in south central Ontario. Until the whole package is known it is hard to assess the appropriateness of individual elements.

The GTAA's Pickering Airport Draft Plan Report

The GTAA has released its Airport Draft Plan and has held a series of open houses to explain it. (For a copy of the draft Plan contact their Brougham site office at 905 619 4822). Attached is a map from that draft that outlines, "Land Use In The Vicinity Of The Airport" recommendations.

Our Position and concerns on reading the Report remain unchanged. We do not object to sufficient land being controlled outside the federal lands to protect the option for a regional airport at some point in future when/if a need is demonstrated. These controls would prevent other development taking place on the lands and as such would be consistent with our general goals.

If at some point, a Regional airport can be justified on the Pickering lands it should be based upon a demonstrated interest from air carriers and a demonstrated need to relieve Pearson with an airport east of the city. However prior to the early 2020's at the very earliest, all are agreed, Pearson can handle all Air Carrier passengers. If an airport were opened in 2012 it would basically be used for General Aviation activity currently handled at Oshawa and Buttonville. The GTAA is assuming that developing this initial facility will cost some \$213 million and that a \$ 2.4 billion facility to handle more major air carrier activity would not be added till at least 2018, if some carriers began to feel there would be a demand segment that would prefer Pickering to Pearson.

Oshawa is currently running at \$100,000 - \$200,000 annual loss, (picked up by the City of Oshawa). The GTAA is currently subsidizing the Buttonville operation at somewhat over \$1million per year. From a general aviation point of view then, keeping Buttonville and Oshawa open say a decade beyond 2012 until 2022, would be much much cheaper than spending over \$ 200 million to open Pickering to handle this traffic, plus the yearly expenses of operating the Pickering facility - including ground rents. And of course there would no doubt be infrastructure support expenses borne by other levels of government.

It is also important to note in this regard that there is no federal mandate or public benefit in supporting the great bulk of general aviation. If during this period some flight training for example ended up having to migrate to airfields further from Toronto to enable these airports to handle traffic that had a more beneficial overall economic impact, so be it.

Assuming Buttonville and Oshawa can remain open, and given Hamilton's current underutilization and its ability to act as a reliever along with other Ontario airports, we believe no business case can be made for opening Pickering until at least the early 2020's. And depending on how the future unfolds in this age of escalating fuel prices and other economic concerns, and Hamilton's role, and further possible expansion of Pearson's capacity, even this date could be pushed out indefinitely.

The GTAA points out the need for far closer collaboration between Federal, Provincial and Municipal levels of government. Local governments are being given the choice of getting an airport subsidized by someone else or nothing. Surely public decisions on

whether to subsidize the premature opening Pickering or to support other priorities like affordable housing, public transit etc. should not be made by authorities like the GTAA. If Provincial and local governments were given some choice, and also had to pay much of the shot for premature opening of Pickering, they would be less supportive and more questioning of the GTAA plan.

The GTAA stresses that they will be asking for no public funds and are proceeding on a business basis. This is very misleading. A major portion of the funding for such an airport will come from the airport fees at Pearson – fees that are essentially a tax on the travelling public, resulting in Pearson being the second most expensive airport in the world. With a monopoly at Pearson it is not hard for the GTAA to subsidize the premature opening of Pickering.

IATA was very blunt in its August 3, 2004 news release castigating the GTAA for its “extravagant airport expansion project which generated over C\$ 6 billion in debt” and its decision to raise airport improvement fees by 25% from \$12 to \$15 per passenger to help pay for it. The cost of landing a 747 at Pearson in 1999 was \$2500; now it is \$9800 and in January it is expected to rise to \$ 11,000!

Cliff MacKay, President of the Air Transport Association of Canada representing our airlines has likewise commented that adding Pickering at a time when Pearson and Hamilton are underutilized would only exacerbate the problem. Adding Pickering MacKay goes on to state is “just not something we’re going to need to worry about until quite some time in the future. The issue of getting costs under control in the GTAA and focusing on building traffic are just so much more important that I’m surprised people are actually spending time on Pickering.”

Another word about Hamilton. In the mid 1990’s before passing on airport planning to the GTAA, Transport Canada completed a Southern Ontario Airports Study (SOAAS). This study slightly preferred Pickering over Hamilton but they agreed it was close and that their study was cursory and their conclusion tentative. Interestingly they also pointed out that the GTAA would be more interested in considering Hamilton and in maximizing its utilization if it fell under their jurisdiction. It is important then to recognize that the GTAA has a bias here.

It is also important to point out that there are far more Ontarians in south central Ontario west of Toronto than east and this imbalance is growing. Over the past decade Durham did not meet its population projections while many areas further west exceeded them. The demographics 20 years from now will even more strongly favour adding capacity to the west. Further Hamilton is a city in decline that has an expressed interest in expanding its airport capacity.

In a recent Globe and mail article favouring Pickering John Barber concluded Pickering’s opening will ‘put the breaks on’ Hamilton’s growth. Why would one ever think it is in the public interest to put the breaks on an underutilized facility to subsidise the opening of a completely greenfield operation in Pickering?

Regarding the Federal Environmental Assessment process the GTAA proposal is subject to, GTAA Vice President Steve Shaw's gives us the glowing assurance this "assures the new airport will never be built if several years of assessment prove it to be unwanted or unnecessary". We just can't buy into this illusion.

We don't pretend to be completely familiar with this assessment process. We do know however that the airport proponent goes into it with very deep pockets and that those opposed have no such resources. Given our experience with the OMB and other such processes we find it exceedingly difficult to believe this process will create anything like a level playing field in which to evaluate the GTAA plan with other alternatives. To conclude then, opening Pickering will have significant environmental and social impacts regardless of how sensitively it is planned. At some point in the future opening Pickering may indeed prove to be justified. We believe however that unless a much more compelling rationale can be made for closing Oshawa and Buttonville, that date is far beyond 2012.

We would urge Transport Canada to review the situation and not allow an Environmental Assessment to proceed at this time unless a compelling case can be made to justify the closing of Buttonville and Oshawa – in the face of the significant negative financial impact building Pickering would have (as noted above) - requiring the establishment of a replacement facility at Pickering within the next 10 – 12 years. If not, the process should be delayed rather than entering a mugs game of justifying an airport based on impossible to forecast socio-economic conditions and air traffic 20 -30 years into the future.

We are currently discussing and obtaining advice on how best to approach this issue.

The Federal Greenspace Lands

It has now been over a year since the ten member Federal Green Space Committee which includes representatives from Municipal, Regional and Conservation organizations including the Green Door Alliance submitted Draft Master Plan recommendations covering the Federal Green Space lands.

Furthermore not counting these lands the Federal Government still holds 11,000 acres of 'airport lands'. Even if the GTAA plan were adopted in its entirety the great majority of these lands would remain green space and could be preserved along with the 7200 acres, with all this acreage forming part of the Province's greenbelt. These Federal and adjacent lands form the largest block of predominantly class 1 foodland anywhere in Canada east of Toronto! These lands link the Moraine to the North with the land to the south where the Province is committed to preserving the Duffin/Rouge Agricultural Preserve and over half of the Seaton lands.

The Government is missing the opportunity to implement a good news greenspace agenda that will get overwhelmingly positive response. And if some tangible on the ground action doesn't take place soon many will begin to assume that regardless of past announcements, green space commitments rate very low on the federal priority list.

The Ag. Lands, Seaton and the land swap.

The City of Pickering and the Province remain at loggerheads. The Province has taken over planning and is proceeding under the Ontario Planning and Development Act to develop a secondary Plan for the Seaton and Ag. Preserve lands. The Province remains committed to preserving the entire preserve. There will be a further opportunity for comment when the secondary plans are made public sometime in the next 1-2 months.

Meanwhile the City is planning to meet to approve their growth Management Study recommendations – recommendations which call for development on the Preserve. Although the Province can ultimately call the shots, the battle isn't over till it is over and given the tremendous financial windfall if parts of the Preserve were developed we still have some concerns that Provincial resolve might weaken.

The swap of land in Richmond Hill for land in Seaton has been agreed to. No agreement has been reached with the Uxbridge developer. This is very likely going to go to legal arbitration with the matter probably resolved sometime in 2005. Any decisions around the final disposition of the Uxbridge lands would follow this resolution.

Trails

We have been working with the TRCA to plan trail extensions west to the Brock road and around the Timbers Pit land east of concession 6. Hiking and biking access to the TRCA land fronting on Durham 23 north of Dagmar is also being considered.

A new TRCA trail map with additions and corrections is being planned for 2005.

Trans Canada Trail implementation in Uxbridge, Pickering, and Ajax is continuing. Signing of the Trail should be largely completed, weather permitting, over the next month. A Trans Canada Trail Booklet has been prepared and plans for dissemination will be made shortly. Formal Trail opening and publicity will not occur until the spring of 2005.

Initiative under the '*Uxbridge Naturally*' umbrella continue to make great headway. Two new Town trails have been opened over the past six months making a total of 3 with at least 3 more planned in 2005.

As far as countryside trails are concerned, landowner discussions aimed at taking sections of the Trans Canada, Oak Ridges and other sections of Trail off road are continuing. A meeting has been held with the Coppins Corner developer, and the developer has agreed to transfer to the twp. a trail corridor from the northeast corner of the site on the Brock Road, along the edge of the planned golf course lands, and south to Durham 21.

Our members have been highly involved in all these initiatives.

Regional Official Plan Review

Regional Planning has released a “Recommended Directions Report” for the Environmental, Rural, and Commercial components of the Plan review. Planning Committee has reserved Jan 4 and 5 to hear delegations. The recommended directions related to Population, Employment and Urban land needs will be presented to Council at a later date. Phone Chris Darling at the Planning Department if you have questions, - 905 728 7731 (Whitby), 905 686 1651 (Toronto)

We will continue to be involved in the Regional Plan revision process – a process likely to be somewhat confused and in part at least prolonged because of the many current Provincial initiatives and the need for the Region to reflect and conform to them.