

Durham Conservation Association / Green Door Alliance Newsletter
June 2009

This newsletter updates members on recent activities of the Durham Conservation Association, (DCA), and its sister organization the Green Door Alliance, (GDA).

Merging the two organizations

As mentioned in our May 2008 news letter the process of merging the two organizations has begun. Simply put there is no need for two organizations, with similar objectives.

The GDA has a long history of accomplishment and has charitable status and a website but has become less active over the past few years. GDA Directors Lorne Almack and Bill Wilder were prime catalysts in setting up the DCA with Bill Wilder becoming the DCA's founding President before Michael Tucker became President.

While the objectives of the two organizations have been similar the GDA has been more policy and research focused, and more involved with the Federal and provincial land holdings and Pickering issues; DCA has been much more active in building membership in recent years, and in private and public land stewardship; land acquisition and trails, and fund raising to support these efforts; and has had more of an Uxbridge focus.

Since the GDA is a registered charity, and the DCA lacks charitable status, the legal entity that will survive will be a renamed GDA.

As a first step the GDA Board and Executive Committee has already been expanded to include DCA executive Committee members. The intent is to complete the merger in 2009. This will include confirming the new officers; a further expansion of the GDA Board that will include DCA Advisory Board members; transferring the assets of the DCA; finalizing a name for the new entity; updating the bylaws and the website; and completing all of the various required regulatory filings for the merged organization.

Urban Area Expansion

In a previous newsletter we mentioned that Durham with the help of consultants was working its way through a planning process entitled 'Growing Durham' aimed at bringing the Region's Official Plan in conformity with the provincial Growth Plan Policies and planning land needs for the period 2006-2031. We have responded in detail at various stages in this process. We remain deeply concerned with Growing Durham's recommendations and the Official Plan Amendments proposed to implement them.

Our concerns are all tied to the projected 2868 hectare, (7,087 acre), extension of the urban area boundary in the Lakeshore municipalities into prime agricultural land and environmentally sensitive areas. The 2868 hectare extension is broken up into 1631 hectares for living area, 351 hectares for nodes and corridors, and 886 hectares for employment lands. 1234 hectares is in Pickering alone and if approved would extend the

urban area boundary east of east duffin creek to concession 8 of Pickering one concession south of Balsam, (see attached Regional Structure map).

Following is how we summarized our concerns in our response to the Plan Amendments proposed by the Region in February 2009.

A With respect to additional Employment Lands beyond current urban boundaries

Errors in the handling of Seaton have confused the Growing Durham analysis of future employment land needs and very greatly inflated the amount of land required.

Future Employment land needs have been further inflated by the Region's insistence on planning for 25,000 more jobs than the Province has requested and insisted upon.

After including 35,000 jobs within Seaton and planning for 350,000 jobs not 375,000 in the Region, there is sufficient supply within existing boundaries until beyond 2031.

B With respect to the need for additional lands for living areas, nodes and corridors

*The handling of Seaton has greatly confused unit mix in the southern municipalities, significantly inflated land needs and masked the lack of progress being made to increase densities and meet Regional and Provincial Policies in areas outside Seaton *.*

Far too great an emphasis has been placed on meeting demands for low density housing with no analysis of the cost and implications to the municipality of meeting such demand.

Provincial and Regional density and intensification goals are hopes only. There are no Proposed action plans, (carrots, sticks, tax incentives etc.), that could turn hope into reality.

Greenfield land requirements are grossly overstated. And overall projected housing unit growth 2006 -2031 could be completely met within the existing urban area boundary if low density percentages are somewhat reduced.

*There is no effort to avoid prime farmland or quantify the impacts of expanding onto it. No urban expansion should take place until a financial and associated action plan has been put in place, and the percentage of low density housing reduced.***

If very limited expansion does take place it should not be on prime farmland.

**Seaton's 70,000 residents comprise 32% of all new Greenfield residents in the southern municipalities in the period 2011-2031. Seaton's 70,000 residents are being housed on 850 gross hectares of land - a gross density of more than 82 persons per hectare - far far higher than the provincial Greenfield requirement of 50 persons/jobs per hectare. Showing how Seaton can distort things, if approximately 32 % of new residents are being added at a density of 82 persons per hectare in Seaton, then in order to meet the overall provincial greenfield intensification target of 50, the remaining 68% of new residents in all Greenfield area in the southern municipalities outside Seaton would only have to achieve an average density of 35 people per hectare. The Seaton model should not be used to mask underachievement elsewhere.*

*** From 77% low density to around 60% in greenfield outside Seaton*

In May the Region responded to comment on the Plan amendments first proposed in February and circulated revised Plan Amendments. The projected urban area expansion was left unchanged, and adding to the concern a number of policies which appeared in the February amendments encouraging higher densities were removed from the May amendment proposal as a result of expressed developer concern. Copies of our more extensive comments made in February as well as our May comments are available for those interested.

The Amendment will unfortunately almost certainly be approved by Regional Council on June 3rd. We remain hopeful however that the Province will insist on changes. In a May 25th letter to the Region the Province stated that Ministry analysis “indicates that the Region has significantly overestimated the need for new designated Greenfield there are sufficient designated and approved opportunities available to accommodate most of the forecasted growth within the built-up and existing designated Greenfield areas.... the proposed large proportion of low density development will undermine both the growth Plan’s and the Region’s stated objectives of creating compact, complete communities”. With respect to the Region's attempt to inflate Provincially approved employment forecasts to justify the need for urban extension the Provincial letter states any land needs “must be revised” to match the Provincial forecasts.

Pickering Airport and Federal Green Space issues

A Pickering Airport

To refresh readers on where we stand now, in 2007 Transport Canada awarded the GTAA with a contract to undertake a needs analysis study of Pickering. Upon receiving this analysis and doing its own due diligence review the Federal Government then must decide whether to proceed or not. If they wish to proceed the next step in the process would be a full public environmental assessment which would likely take another 2-3 years before a final decision. This long delayed needs analysis has still not been completed by the GTAA.

We thought it might be helpful to assess the current ‘business case’ for why the GTAA has in recent years felt Pearson and Hamilton are not enough and why they feel it makes sense to open Pickering as well.

For starters it is helpful to look at demographics. The Hamilton Airport Gateway Opportunities Study conducted by Price Waterhouse Coopers in 2002 divides Central Ontario into 3 regions; east composed of Durham, Haliburton, Kawartha Lakes, Northumberland and Peterborough, central composed of Simcoe, York and Toronto; and west composed of Dufferin, Peel, Halton, Wellington, Waterloo, Hamilton Brant, Haldimand and Niagara.

In 2001 41.9% of the population was in the west; 47.5% in the central area; and **only 10.5% in the east**. According to this 2002 study if one looks at projected 2021 populations

The west would grow to 43.9% of the total; the central area remains at 47% and **the east slides to 9.2%.**

The only reason for going into some the detail above is that the importance of having an airport to the east continues to be used by the GTAA to justify Pickering. In assessing this it is important to be aware of the demographic realities mentioned above. Pearson is at demographic centre of the Region. And the western portion of south central Ontario is more than 4 times larger than the east and growing faster.

The GTAA 'business case' was contained in a Financial Assessment analysis prepared in 2002 and referenced in their 2004 Pickering Airport Draft Plan Report. To our knowledge nothing more recent has been made public.

Again it is a very cursory report prepared for the GTAA. In a nutshell it looks at 3 different passenger forecast scenarios ranging between 54 and almost 60 million in the year 2032; and then allocates 50 million passengers to Pearson and assumes Pickering handles the rest. It then estimates costs and funding sources for these scenarios. Funding sources included GTAA Airport Revenue Bonds, bank lines of credit held by the GTAA and Airport Improvement Fee, (AIF) revenues collected at both Pearson as well as Pickering. The AIF revenues generated at Pearson and applied to Pickering ranged from \$345 million to \$1.058 billion. AIF revenue at Pickering ranged from \$251 million to \$333 million.

The analysis then concludes that if the GTAA with its monopoly at Pearson can charge users at Pearson between \$345 million and \$1 billion it can generate sufficient funds to open and operate Pickering.

- it doesn't tell us how much cheaper it would be to handle the traffic at Hamilton
- like all Transport Canada and GTAA reports it is based on forecasts going out 20-25 years into the future. **As already noted in 1972 Transport Canada forecast 62 million passengers at Pearson in 2000 – passengers in 2006 six years later were half that – 31 million!**
This 2002 financial forecast projects almost 39 million passengers in 2009, 25% more than the GTAA's most recent forecast for 2009!

Further to this the GTAA published its Pearson Master Plan last year. Given the economic meltdown and projections for lower traffic in 2009, in an early 2009 news release they project some 1.8 million fewer passengers in 2009. The result is that the passenger forecast of 36 million for 2010 is now unlikely to be realized until 3-4 years beyond that. This pushes their estimates of when even they feel Pearson's capacity may be reached into the 2021-2026 time period. And their Master Plan Report suggests further measures "have a theoretical potential to increase passenger capacity by 5-10% or more."

And of course even if such measures were not taken the essential question is - why can't Hamilton handle any excess and along with Pearson provide sufficient additional capacity for the foreseeable future.

With respect to development at Hamilton their 2004 Airport Master Plan update indicates future airfield capacity is 265,000 operations per year which they state, (see page 34), translates into approximately 15.4 million passengers. And I am sure if the GTAA were to negotiate with them the GTAA could strike a deal that wouldn't see them taking the same \$300million - \$1 billion from passengers at Pearson that their financial analysis contemplates for Pickering! The GTAA's attitude towards using Hamilton would be very different if they were part of the same Authority rather than competitors.

To summarize then the 'business case' of those who oppose Pickering is that given as the GTAA indicates Pearson can handle at least 50 million passengers, and when necessary Hamilton can handle at least another 15 million, Central Ontario's air carrier capacity needs will be met for the foreseeable future. So Pickering is not needed. And of course when one factors in more and more expensive oil, combined with inevitable future caps on emissions the case against Pickering becomes even more overwhelming.

B General Aviation

The GTAA uses the closing of Buttonville and Oshawa as a rationale for Pickering. Indeed knowing that the business case for anything other than a general aviation airport is weak they recognize that for a number of years after opening Pickering would likely be a general aviation airport.

Regarding Oshawa, as reported in an earlier newsletter, a 2006 economic development study commissioned by Oshawa Council indicated the airport has a very positive impact and contributed some \$60 million to Oshawa and the Regional economy. Oshawa followed up and approved the Oshawa Municipal Airport Business Plan in 2008 – a plan that confirmed the importance of the airport as an economic driver, and in order to attract new investments committed itself to staying open for a minimum of 25 years regardless of what happens at Pickering.

The GTAA after some arm twisting by the Federal Government has for the past number of years been supporting the Buttonville operation to the tune of \$1.5 million per year. The cost of subsidizing Buttonville is a very small fraction compared to opening Pickering. However the GTAA citing financial problems has just announced funding will cease. The Buttonville owner indicates the subsidy is needed to continue operation.

Buttonville is some 165 acres in size. Airport opponents have long believed that decisions on what should happen with such airports should be left to the private sector and local governments. Airport opponents believe any decision on whether or not to build an airport on the Federal government lands should be based on whether or not a case can be made that it is needed for major air carriers. If not, as mentioned above other solutions to General Aviation should be found.

And any general aviation solution to the possible closing of a 165 acre airport should not be used as a springboard for the GTAA to fund a much larger airport at Pickering subsidized in a major way by the traveling public at Pearson.

C Federal Green Space Lands

While continuing to oppose the airport we also continue to make the case that regardless of whether or not an airport is built, a green space plan should be put in place for the lands even airport proponents agree will never be needed for an airport. This should include not only the 7200 acre Federal Green Space lands but a further 6,000 or so acres including the main branch of the west Duffin that are in the Provincial greenbelt on the west side of the 18,600 acre airport site.

Both 'top down' and 'bottom up' approaches are being taken towards this issue. From the bottom a meeting has recently been held with Federal Green Space officials and they have finally agreed on opening a trail head at the north end of the Federal Green Space lands. We are hopeful that this trail head can be opened and connected via a recently acquired strip of land which DCA was highly involved with and financially contributed to, to the TRCA's Goodwood tract and the Oak Ridges Trail. The TRCA has also been involved in a number of other bottom up initiatives aimed at natural area regeneration.

The initial top down approach began with the creation of a Green Space Advisory Committee in 2002 to advise on the creation of a Green Space Master Plan. The GDA was one of the NGO's represented on this committee. This plan was submitted in 2003 and continues to gather dust after Transport Canada reversed their position and decided to halt any further consideration until a decision on the airport was made.

Our organizations would support a variety of proposals if that's what it takes to get long overdue action in this area. We cannot understand why both Federal parties over the last 6 years have been so slow to act. Politically it seems a win win proposition. For little money one can be seen to be being a champion of the environment without needing to take a position on the airport itself.

The most recent proposal that has made the news in April of this year involved a proposal to create a 16,000 hectare national park that would encompass both the Rouge Park and the Federal lands within the Provincial Greenbelt. The proposal has the support of a few Federal MP's and former MP's but it is anybodies guess at this point whether it will lead anywhere.

Since we feel this publicly owned class 1 farmland so close to Toronto should for the most part remain farmed and not planted in trees our support would depend on the approach being taken to this issue as well as issues of land tenure and heritage.

Taking the Trans Canada Trail off road south of Town.

DCA members sit on Twp. trail Committees and are working closely with the town and conservation authorities to finalize trail routes and agreements with landowners to take the Trans Canada Trail off road running east from con 7 just south of Elgin Park to the unopened 8th concession, and then south between Brookdale Road and Durham 23.

In addition to the trail itself a series of loop trails are being planned in order to provide an area south east of town that while not as extensive as the Countryside Preserve to the south west of the urban area, will provide similar passive recreation opportunities.

Almost all agreements are now in place. Durham Conservation Association will be the lead organization in submitting a Trillium grant in November in partnership with the Trans Canada Trail Association who we hope will also provide some funding, and the Township which has already provided very extensive financial and staff leadership and support in drawing up legal agreements, surveying and acquiring lands, etc. in order to bring this effort along so far. We are currently working out cost estimates for the trail, (Bridges, boardwalk, trail signs/posts, maps, trail grading etc.) Lake Simcoe and Region Conservation authority is also being consulted on stream crossings.

If the grant request is successful we hope to complete the work with largely volunteer labour by the fall of 2010/spring of 2011.

The Durham Conservation Trust and associated donations

The Conservation Foundation of Greater Toronto is holding funds in trust for the Durham Conservation Association as well as for some Durham Conservation Association members who have donated significant funds on their own. These funds are being used to leverage significant amounts from other funding partners in order to accomplish objectives important to the Durham Conservation Association. Over \$140,000 has been spent to date on a variety of initiatives - \$40,000 on supporting land acquisition to provide off road trail connects between public land holdings; \$60,000 on the rehabbing the Timbers pit; \$10,000 on the launch of the countryside Preserve; \$20,000 on assisting the TRCA in combating invasive species; and a further \$19,000 in supporting the creation of a permanent staff TRCA staff presence in the Glen major area and in supporting the initial salary of a part time 'trails co-coordinator' for the twp.

We are presently budgeting to spend a further \$100,000 in later 2009 in supporting a strategic land acquisition that we are hopeful will proceed and is likely to cost a million dollars. Strategic land acquisition is a particular priority as we work to create trail and natural heritage linkages between conservation lands and communities.

We are very appreciative of the generosity of all of our donors. If any readers would be interested in knowing more about how they might support this effort as we work with the TRCA, the twp. and other partners to achieve our common objectives please get in touch with a member of the executive.

It is important for prospective donors to the trust to know as well that every dollar provided by the trust has been used to leverage far more significant contributions from others. For example the costs our funding partners have paid to acquire conservation lands and trail connects has been 6-10 times more than the amounts we have contributed to them for that purpose.

And we are hopeful that funds raised to assist the TRCA and the township in initially covering some of the expenses associated with retaining permanent local part time staff to help better manage these conservation and passive recreation lands will pay dividends well after our contributions have ceased. Similarly funds contributed to combating invasive species have not only been far more than matched by others in hard dollars, such initiatives have also enabled us to engage the broader community in volunteering their efforts.

Uxbridge – Trail Capital of Canada

In 2008 Uxbridge went through the trademark process and was informed in late fall that it was now registered as “Trail Capital of Canada” Council has approved the adoption of a unique logo designed by Wynn Walters, which will be used at town entry points, and for road signage and public relations activities.

On Saturday October 3 the town will be celebrating this special historic moment throughout the Township, in conjunction with the province, the conservation authorities (TRCA plus LSRCA), conservation groups, and neighbours from surrounding areas.

Numerous trail events will take place within this far reaching network comprising "The Trails of Uxbridge Township," leading up to the special launch date

We are hopeful that premier McGuinty will use this opportunity to announce that a management plan for the 1,300 acre Tannenbaum lands will begin to be initiated. This would represent a significant contribution to the Green Belt, and greatly complement and extend natural heritage and trail linkages, as the province partners with Uxbridge and other community partners in promoting the greenbelt vision.

The TRCA Lands

The TRCA is in the midst of an update to its Management Plan for the East Duffins Headwater area properties. Considerable work has already been done including GPS ‘ing all existing trails and identifying and cataloging the diverse plant and animal populations on these properties. The Management Plan update process will determine what the priorities are for these properties.

A public meeting will be held on June 25th to introduce the planning process to the general public and to seek their input on a number of issues. The “open house and presentation” will take place from 7:00pm to 8:30pm at the Goodwood Community Centre. The TRCA will brief the meeting on its invasive species strategy, gravel pit restoration project and private land stewardship opportunities.

The TRCA’s 250 acre Wilder Forest and Wild life Tract – acquired as a result of Bill and Billie Wilders very generous contribution a few years ago, along with the 130 acre former Pleasure Valley properties also acquired by the TRCA will be a focus of this update because the TRCA did not own these properties situated between the Brock Road

and concession 6 when the original management plan was prepared in 2003. The existing trail system will be expanded onto the Wilder lands. However trail possibilities within the 130 acre former Pleasure Valley property are likely to be limited. They are currently being discussed with the Pleasure Valley owner who retained certain exclusive trail rights for an extended period after their sale.

The issue of access will also be addressed along with ensuring connections with the Brock Tract to the south and the Walker Woods to the east. DCA members who are on the executive committee of the stewardship group will be very active in this planning process. DCA members who have specific concerns should let us know so that they can be considered by the working group.

Aggregate Issues – The Timbers Pit

After many years of hard work by local residents and the TRCA this abandoned, derelict piece of real estate is taking shape as another jewel in the TRCA's Glen Major area conservation lands.

This year work is proceeding on the following:

- construction of a sustainable trail traversing the front bowl
- design and construction of educational signage
- action to more effectively stabilize eroding slopes in pit areas closer to the road.
- enhancing and extending the parking lot
- planting and wetland monitoring including planting of 15 more large caliper trees along trails and viewing areas
- a community planting and recognition event

A steering committee comprised of Uxbridge Town staff, MNR personnel, aggregate industry representation, university faculty and local conservation organizations are discussing ways that the site could be developed into an outdoor classroom, showcasing the latest science in pit restoration and rehabilitation. DCA members are actively involved in these efforts. In particular John McCutcheon continues to be a major catalyst.

The Ontario Stone, Sand and Gravel Association has agreed to consider the steering committee's request for in kind contribution of gravel, equipment and personnel to help with the current list of projects.

Based on the successful completion of this year's program funded in part by the McCutcheon Foundation an official opening and ribbon cutting ceremony, including a senior member of the Ontario government, is planned for the fall

Uxbridge Town Trails

With initial first year financial support from Durham Conservation Association Uxbridge Township has hired a part time trails coordinator, Victoria Walker. Victoria's initial efforts are directed to familiarizing herself with Town trails meeting the trail captains but has managed to initiate a number of new initiatives

- working with the birder group and local scout troop to install 40 blue bird houses in the Countryside Preserve
- with Dave Taylor has met with members of Uxbridge Secondary School to explore ways students could provide community work requirements by being involved with trail projects and possibly collaborating on environmental studies and physical education programs
- attended a one day seminar on "walkability" as a result council has endorsed the International for Walking and has designated October as walking month. Victoria is certified to lead walks using the Nordic Walking poles.

Two new trails will be launched this year.

- The Butternut Loop a small loop trail that takes walkers through the Butternut tree for which the development is named connecting to the South Balsam
- The Cedars trail situated in the southwest quadrant of the Town will also connect to the South Balsam, the new Heathwood development pond and park, then through a beautiful cedar bush that travels alongside the Brook

A number of initiatives have occurred in the Countryside Preserve

- A number of Scots pines have been removed from an area that will greatly enlarge the meadowlands providing an expanded nesting area for meadowland birds.
- Wynn Walters in conjunction with LSRCA has developed a series of interpretive signs on specific aspects of the Preserve's ecology, Meadows, Wetlands, streams and pond areas and a large panoramic sign on top of observation Hill
- Local artists have contributed 2 more painting picture displays in the Preserve