

Durham Conservation Association / Green Door Alliance Newsletter
December 2003

This newsletter will bring members up to date on the recent activities of the Durham Conservation association, (DCA), and its sister organization the Green Door Alliance, (GDA). It will also comment on the status of other issues that are important to our membership.

Seaton Land Swap / Agricultural Preserve Lands

As noted in previous newsletters the Green Door Alliance has worked to protect the Duffin / Rouge Agricultural preserve for years and originated the proposal for easement protection. Prior to the recent election the Provincial Conservatives and Pickering were at loggerheads. The City of Pickering was supporting, and continue after the election to support a Growth Management Study funded by developers with interests in the Agricultural Preserve. The Growth management Study is currently recommending that lands in the Agricultural Preserve as well as Seaton be developed.

The Provincial Conservatives on the other hand opposed development on the Agricultural preserve and intervened by imposing a Ministers Zoning Order to permanently protect the Agricultural Preserve and take over responsibility for developing a secondary Plan for the adjacent Seaton Lands.

During the election Dalton McGuinty reconfirmed in writing the plank in the Liberal Party Platform to protect “ all of the lands in the Duffin Rouge Agricultural Preserve....and two-thirds of the Seaton lands.”

Green Door Alliance and Durham Conservation members worked very hard during the summer/fall to communicate the need for Agricultural preserve protection and the enormous public rip off that could occur, if land in the Preserve sold by the Province some 3-4 years ago at agricultural values for some \$ 4,000 per acre, with publicly held easements on them, which required protection from development ‘in perpetuity’, and now largely controlled by developers, were to be rezoned for development. Land rezoned for development could be worth \$ 150,000 per acre.

After the election the Liberals backed off a number of their promises including a commitment to stop the building of 6600 homes on the Moraine in Richmond Hill. Some 5700 homes are being allowed, and in return for cutting back on the numbers, developers are being compensated by more land in Seaton.

We very much hope that Liberals will not back off their promise to protect the Agricultural Preserve along with environmentally sensitive lands in Seaton, and that they will work with the City of Pickering, to ensure that the City develop a secondary Plan that protects the Ag Preserve, and results in secondary Plan for Seaton, that is a model of environmentally sensitive, compact, mixed use, transit supported development.

We believe there is more than enough developable land in Seaton, that is not environmentally sensitive to satisfy agreements made by both the Conservative and now by the Liberal governments with developers to swap land in Richmond Hill and Uxbridge, for land in Seaton.

The new government will be making decisions soon and we will be working hard to make our positions known. Please urge the Provincial Liberals to not break their commitments to Agricultural Preserve protection, and to proceed with the land swap in an open transparent fashion, and get on with the development of a model community. (For readers who wish more information on this subject please check out our previous newsletter and other articles and submissions at www.greendooralliance.ca).

Other High Priorities Requiring Provincial Action.

There are a number of other key areas where urgent Provincial action is required;

- The Provincial Policy Statement (PPS) governs Regional, Municipal, and OMB land use decisions throughout the Province. The Previous government initiated a review but to date nothing has come of it. The PPS needs toughening up – it is a critical component in any fight against urban sprawl.
- The time is long past due for OMB reform.
- Cities need to get a better deal in support for public transit, affordable housing etc.
- However it is done, whether it is done through the smart growth councils set up by the previous government; a resurrected Provincial Office of the Greater Toronto Area; or a recreated Greater Toronto Area Services Board with clout, an approach towards growth management in the GTA needs to be taken. This lack of planning is costing the area dearly.

Over the past few years we have submitted extensive recommendations on these issues. We continue to be involved individually and in concert with other groups to push for change. The Province and the new Municipal Affairs Minister John Gerretsen are making positive statements around some of these issues. For example the current wording in the Planning Act only requires decisions to ‘have regard for’ Provincial Policy. The Liberals are talking of toughening up this wording to require decisions, “be consistent with” Provincial Policy.

Uxbridge Naturally

Uxbridge Naturally is an initiative between the Township of Uxbridge, and conservationists to develop a rural strategy for the Township focusing on protecting and extending natural areas and trail linkages. Mayor Gerri Lynn O’Connor is highly involved in this effort as are Conservation Durham members Brian Buckles, Michael Tucker, John McCutcheon, and Wynn Walters, and Uxbridge Conservation association member Dave Martin.

We are very excited by the recent Township purchase of the 99 acre Hayden property, at the south west corner of the Uxbridge Urban Area, (behind Walmart and Rona Lumber).

This is an absolutely beautiful property. One of *Uxbridge Naturally's* key priorities is to have off road trail connections extending from communities to the countryside and to the large network of Countryside trails including the Trans Canada and Oak Ridges Trail and TRCA and Regional Forest trail networks as well as other yet to be developed trails. It is hard to see a property that is more conducive to meeting this objective. This property is immediately adjacent to the urban area, and in future can hopefully be connected not only off road to and across Elgin Park Drive to the center of Town, but south to other public lands.

Recently as well the first of the Uxbridge Town Trails – The Quaker trail was opened. The intent is to open trails in other quadrants of the town over the next few years.

Toronto and Region Conservation Authority Lands

As mentioned in our last news letter the TRCA has completed its Management Planning exercise for TRCA lands in the Duffin creek headwaters. This Plan is being submitted to Durham Region, the City of Pickering, and the Township of Uxbridge for their endorsement. When the Plan has been endorsed by these bodies the TRCA will proceed to establish stewardship committees to assist them in the management and maintenance of their properties. We expect this process will start early in 2004. Conservation Durham members will be active on these stewardship committees.

Trail systems in the TRCA's Walker Woods and Glen Major properties are discussed in the Trans Canada Trail section below.

The Trans Canada Trail (TCT)

Conservation Durham members are very involved in the many trail initiatives in Durham including the TCT. The section of the Trans Canada Trail in Uxbridge that runs roughly north / south through the TRCA lands between Houston Road and the Uxbridge / Pickering town line has been completed and signed. The trail can be identified by TCT signs posted at regular intervals.

The TRCA has published a trail guide and map for all the trail systems in these lands including the TCT main trail and two TCT loop trails in the Glen major area. These loop trails are also identified and signed as the Town line and Ridge loops. Numbered location posts have also been placed at strategic locations so that trail users will be able to determine their position on the trails by referencing the trail map. A copy of the guide and map is enclosed for your use and reference.

Trail routing from the TRCA lands at Houston Road north to the Town of Uxbridge, is well advanced and should be finalized in the next 2-3 months. DCA members have been very active in this effort which has involved working with the municipality, developers, aggregate operators and private land owners to get as much of the trail off road as possible.

Regarding the routing of the trail through Pickering and Ajax, Ajax and Pickering councils approved the Pickering / Ajax TCT trail committee's recommendations this fall. Implementation will begin next year. Once again DCA members were active on the Committee.

Regional Official Plan Review (ROP), Process

The Durham Region Planning Department has produced a series of discussion papers as part of its review of its five year review of the Regional Official Plan and asked for public comment by November 28th. These papers may be viewed at www.region.durham.on.ca or in paper form by contacting the Planning department. We for the most part enthusiastically support the staff directions. We have attended open houses, completed a submission and will continue to be involved in the Plan Review process as it comes before Planning Committee and Council.

In particular we support planning staff recommendations to limit rural growth; and remove current Official Plan Policies that allowed country residential subdivisions, farm retirement lots; the addition of any new residential clusters, or further residential infilling within existing concentrations of 10 acre lots.

We also support recommendations to maintain the current urban boundaries and only consider adjustments to urban area boundaries as part of the next 5-year review.

Additionally we very much support efforts to develop a land securement strategy in consultation with other stakeholders along with the creation of a reserve fund to support such efforts. We would like however to see this effort explicitly aimed at creating trail linkages as well as natural heritage protection.

We also support ROP amendment to allow the consideration of a severance which facilitates conveyance of a natural heritage feature to a public body or non profit entity for conservation purposes. We feel however the staff recommendations are too limiting. This is an essential element in some instances in being able to acquire trail/natural heritage connections at a cost the public can handle.

Please contact Brian Buckles (phone 905 649 3331, e-mail Buckles@total.net) if you wish a copy of the submission our associations have made.

Federal Green Space Lands / GTAA Master Planning Process

There is little new to report from our last update on these fronts. The 10 member Federal Green Space Committee which includes representatives from Municipal, Regional and Conservation organizations including the Green Door Alliance has just completed its Draft master Plan recommendations covering the 7500 acre federal Green Space lands

and submitted them to the Transport Minister. Current plans envisage an opportunity for public comment over the winter before recommendations are finalized.

With respect to the GTAA Master Planning process for a possible new Regional Airport the Master Plan will be completed and made public in the spring of 2004, followed by a multi year Environmental Assessment process and a subsequent federal decision on whether and how to proceed.

Managed Forest Property Tax Treatment

In our last news letter we mentioned that the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC) has moved from its previous commitment to assess managed forests the same as farmland and now plans to base the managed forest assessment on market value.

To show the counter productive nature of this change some of our members have property taxed as farmland in a core/linkage area of the Moraine where the Province wants to ensure protection/enhancement. Yet if they plant trees on this marginal farmland, and operate as a managed forest as ecologists are urging them to do, they will lose their farmland status and their property tax will increase.

This change will make it more difficult to encourage landowners to be good stewards and expand natural areas throughout the province. The Ontario Wood lot Association and the Ontario Forestry Association are urging the new liberal government to change the wording in the assessment act to ensure similar tax treatment between farmland and managed forest. Again letters to your local rep, and to David Ramsey the Minister of the environment, and Greg Sobara the Finance Minister who has responsibility for the assessment act, would be helpful.

Johnson OMB Hearing

A pre –hearing conference was held on September 12, 2003 before OMB member S.W. Lee. Mr., Lee was not prepared to hear arguments at this pre-hearing and ruled the Hearing itself would commence on January 19, 2004 at 10:30 a.m. in the Pickering Council Chambers. Durham Conservation Association is a party to this hearing.