

Report on Phase 1: Pickering's Growth Management Study

Prepared for: The Whitevale Community Association

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Background

The 1968 Toronto Centered Region Plan proposed a green belt around Metro Toronto. The concept was trashed by developer pressure and the Pickering airport proposal. But the vision survived in Pickering. In 1975 Premier Davis cancelled support for an airport and declared a green space buffer between Toronto and Pickering. A development node was planned at Pickering for lands east of the Duffins to be known as Seaton. Part of the area; west of the Duffins was then designated for a dump by the Peterson Government. This proved very unpopular and Durham West riding elected the NDP. The Rae Government declared the 5,000 acres an Agriculture Preserve but foolishly entrusted management to the Ontario Realty Corp. (ORC) The Harris government ordered ORC to sell the land. To comply with Durham's Official Plan ORC had to submit a "lotting plan". As a condition of approval both Pickering and Regional Councils, supported by the Green Door Alliance, specified that ORC register *conservation easements* on title before selling the farms. The easements reduced speculative value and made properties affordable for farming. Pickering's Mayor Arthurs and local developers and their lobbyist objected, so by amendment to the resolution Pickering was designated holder/trustee of the easements. Then, ORC helped provide tenants with mortgage money supplied by two rich, politically powerful developers. Effective ownership now resides with these developers. The goal of establishing a family farm community has at least temporarily been frustrated.

The Seaton lands east of the Duffins proceeded through several planning exercises including the Seaton Community Plan. A later group the Seaton Advisory Committee composed of representatives from the community, Council and the Province (Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing) worked for many months reviewing all previous work and set up a continent-wide design competition, won by planner John Van Nostrand, for a compact live/work

community that could accommodate between 65,000 and 95,000 people but retained environmentally sensitive areas and a farming component.

When the Province announced the land swap — Richmond Hill land for Seaton land, local Pickering developers saw their opportunity to develop Seaton diminish. Pickering Council, with some justification, was incensed by the unilateral, non-consultative initiative of Queens Park.

So, Pickering decided to end run the Province with a developer-financed Growth Management Study of Seaton and the Agriculture Preserve.

Phase 1 of the Growth Management study is complete and as expected the Agriculture Preserve, now downgraded to an agriculture assembly, is included in four of five options for urban growth. Concurrently, the Province has issued a Minister's Zoning Order under the Planning Act that requires the easement be enforced and the land be preserved for agriculture *in perpetuity*... Regional Council recently reaffirmed its position that the 5,000 acres be an Agriculture Preserve as designated in the Official Plan.

The Hon. Janet Ecker who supports the retention of Agriculture Preserve status is being challenge by Mayor Arthurs in the upcoming Provincial election.

The Conservation/Environmental community support Ecker. Gerry Couglan and Silvia DeGasperous, two powerful developers who have effective ownership through mortgage control, are backed by some previous tenants of the Agriculture Preserve. They support Mayor Arthurs. They are richly funded and have already taken out full-page ads—three to date (\$2500 each) claiming injustice and spreading fear and confusion.

Phase 1 Results: Growth Management Study

The Terms of Reference determined the conclusion: disappointing and disingenuous planning for the past.

There is no recognition of the need to build a city that helps Canada meet the commitments of the Kyoto Accord. No concern for bedroom communities that produce smog, waste time and are expensive to service. Cities of the future have to be energy efficient—minimize auto use (commuting), reduce heating and cooling energy demand and provide smog-free healthy air and safe pure water. Communities that work will not tolerate corporate industrial agriculture, huge

energy consuming houses, long commutes to work or play and energy wasteful transportation.

Pickering's developers, their lobbyist, consultants, planning staff, the Mayor and Councilors should embrace the 21st century. Participation in the Ontario Smart Growth Network (<http://www.peasfulcommunities.ca/2003/July/july22.htm>) would help in their re-education.

The consultants have not benefited from the Seaton Community Group Plan or the later evaluation and design competition which provided "a *new urbanism* plan"—live/work, non-auto dependent, pedestrian/cycling friendly, culturally diverse, linking farm families to urban neighbours. The Seaton Community Plan is heritage sensitive, conserving the unique Whitevale settlement and heritage Whitevale road. It is supportive of natural history, outdoor recreation and outdoor education opportunities. These in combination provide a family-friendly community, open to a variety of family styles and ages.

Five options are presented for public comment. They provide no real choice. They are all plans to urbanize Pickering's countryside with sprawl-type traditional subdivisions—uneconomic, environmentally injurious, typical of the 70s, leading to the impoverishment of Ontario.

Specific Comments Follow:

- The consultants, Dillon and Ag Plan, should declare the conflict of interest arising from funding of the study by the landowner/developers. The public should be aware that the consultants are advocates for a particular developer position.

- The population forecast for Seaton of 75,000 to 90,000 people has become a target to be met without consideration of the wisdom of such growth—the costs and benefits, economy and environmental consequences.

- The five options would use:

	Planned ha.	Increase ha. over Option 1	(increased acres)
Option 1	1291	0	
Option 2	1525	234	578
Option 3	1801	510	1260
Option 4	1849	558	1379
Option 5	1618	327	808

Any development that includes Agriculture Preserve land uses more land than Seaton alone (Option 1) and ignores previous planning of the Seaton Community Group which proposed even less land consumption.

- The Province wants to maintain the Agriculture Preserve *in perpetuity* and has agreed to transfer some 52.5 % of Seaton to a conservation trust. None of the Dillon/Developer options propose transferring land or easements to a conservation trust. There is no guarantee that future Official Plan Amendments would not add more land to development, given developer pressure and influence over time.

- Farmland conservation is dismissed by an exhaustive manipulation of data which examines suitability for large commercial, industrial agri- business rather than for family farms. The Ag Plan consultants ignore the unique farming opportunities inherent in a near-city location such as direct farmer to consumer sales. The May issue of “Better Farming—The Business Magazine for Ontario Agriculture” cover story is titled: *Organic boom... Growers are challenged to meet demand for a new grocery category.*

The final Report of the East Markham Strategic Review Committee in reference to the Markham Agriculture Preserve states: *Eastern Markham has a rich agricultural heritage and the potential to support agriculture over the long term with its excellent soils, long growing season and proximity to diverse markets.*

The report goes on to recommend: tenant purchases of land from ORC; agriculture in perpetuity; immediate placement of a Minister’s Zoning Order; exploration of a land trust, application of easements and proposes expanded uses including: poultry, fruit farming, market gardens, organic farming, horticulture, plant nurseries, forestry, bed and breakfasts, country inns, winery or cidery, maple syrup and honey and U-picks. The Markham Planners are very upbeat and see the benefits of farming land surrounded by urban residences. Pickering’s consultants chose to ignore these opportunities and reported negatively on agricultural opportunity in Pickering’s Agriculture Preserve. The two Agriculture Preserves, East Markham and Pickering are contiguous. The quality farmland and economic family farm opportunity does not stop at the Town Line.

The consultants, to satisfy their client, interpret the Planning Act and Policy Guidelines requiring that: “No Class 1 foodland will be developed unless there is no reasonable alternative,” to be a loophole allowing development. They confirm the findings of previous studies: that most of the Agriculture Preserve is CLI, Class 1 crop land but interpret *reasonable* in a narrow traditional context. Reasonable is in the eye of the beneficiary.

- No recognition is given to financial consequences arising from options 2–5. If 1,000 acres of Agriculture Preserve land is urbanized and 1,000 less of

Seaton, the developer profits by over \$100 million and the Province (we the people) lose over \$100 million. A hundred million dollars could pay for Seaton infrastructure and support a real transit friendly, live/work Seaton Community and a host of Smart Growth initiatives.

- All options ignore Smart Growth principles. The industrial /commercial lands are shown along a 407 corridor and living areas are well to the south—beyond walking/cycling distance. They appear designed to provide ground level parking for Wal-Mart, Home Depot, Costco and the like.

- No analysis is provided to explain the reasons for the five options. No comparative costs and benefits are provided. One must conclude that there is no rational behind the displays other than confusing the public and providing vast areas and freedom for secondary plan development.

- Allowing any of the Agriculture Preserve land to be developed and Official Plans amended to accommodate selective land owners, sets a precedent that would justify other land owners appealing to the Ontario Municipal Board for equal treatment. Why not also allow the previous owners of Seaton to speculate?

- The report and proposed options designed to facilitate (control) the debate are plans from the past—continued greenspace absorption, food land growing sprawl houses—no vision for sustainable growth or a strategy to implement Smart Growth and Canada’s Kyoto target.

- 20% of the target population growth is accommodated by infilling in option 1 but only 10 % infilling in options 2 and 3. Densities are typical of past standards—very low (less than 10) and not compatible with Smart Growth.

- The City, developers and their consultants accept the 90,000 forecast as if it were a fact—a very dubious assumption, designed to be self-fulfilling.

(Reminiscent of Transport Canada’s 1972 forecast of 64 million passengers flying in/out of Toronto by year 2,000.)

It is unlikely. It won’t and should not happen. Present citizens cannot afford the subsidies to accommodate such a population explosion without smart growth. This forecast dates back to 80’s. It is based on a huge Pickering airport providing thousands of jobs, on 407 attracting industry and commerce, on a future mirroring the past. The consultants report that only 21% of Pickering residents work in Pickering—79% commute to other regions and 57% commute to Toronto. They warn that this undesirable condition may continue.

The very important job forecast is a simple extrapolation of the past. It assumes that job growth will follow population growth—one garbage forecast derived from another. How many Wal-Mart and McDonalds do we need?

- The consultants argue that developing the Agriculture Preserve has lower infrastructure costs—closer to water and sewers and fewer bridges. They ignore: the lost value of the Seaton publicly owned land (over \$100,000,000) and that smart growth infilling/redevelopment and intensification could save even more infrastructure taxpayer's money.

Conclusion

(1) The conservation/environmental community and all concerned citizens should refuse to participate in this sham, phony, developer-controlled, meaningless public process. None of the options are acceptable—none provide real choices. They are mere variations on the same theme. Options 4 to 5 consume more resources than the Seaton alone option. All ignore the rather conservative Seaton Community Group Plan which predates the Smart Growth movement.

(2) The only recourse available to the public is political. Conservation of our countryside and money depends on a patriotic, enlightened public demanding change that preserves our countryside and resources. Land use planning decisions should not be decided by developers and those who serv them.

(3) The city should commission a Growth Management Study, publicly financed, done by independent planning consultants not obligated to the development industry that examines:

- Opportunities for infilling, redevelopment, and intensification
- Other Options e.g. a population distribution of 80% within existing urban boundaries and 20% at Seaton.

(4) The city should assign the Easements on the Agriculture Preserve properties to the Ontario Farmland Trust while exploring ways of supporting local agriculture with infrastructure such as: a farmers' market, meat processing, dairy products processing, soy bean crushing and products manufacture, The **Pickering** brand could become a symbol of quality and purity for Toronto consumers.

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