

Durham Conservation / Green Door Alliance Newsletter

June 2004

This newsletter updates members on the recent activities of the Durham Conservation Association (DCA), and its sister organization the Green Door Alliance, (GDA). Related issues of importance to our membership will also be commented on.

The Agricultural Preserve Lands and the Seaton development and land swap

Over the past six months the GDA has continued efforts to protect the Agricultural Preserve from development. We have had numerous meetings with provincial officials including Municipal Affairs Minister John Gerretsen; appeared before Pickering Council; participated in a phone in on local cable T.V.; and submitted further written comments opposing Pickering's developer funded Phase 2 Growth Management Study Report which recommends development within the Ag. Preserve lands as well as within Seaton.

Over this period Minister Gerretsen has written two letters to Pickering Council confirming the Liberal Party's election commitment to protecting the Duffin Rouge Agricultural preserve lands from development – a commitment shared by all 3 Provincial parties. However in March, Pickering Council “endorsed for consultation”, the Phase 2 Growth Management Report recommending development on the Ag Preserve, but are not meeting to consider approving it until June 29, after the Federal election.

At this point Pickering approval seems almost a foregone conclusion, with the strong likelihood that the Province and the Municipality will continue to be at loggerheads over what should happen to the Ag. Preserve lands.

However the Province has asserted itself and engaged a consulting team under the direction of John Van Nostrand and his firm Planning Alliance to prepare a development plan under the Ontario Planning and Development Act for North Pickering, covering both Seaton and the Duffin Rouge Agricultural Preserve. The development plan will contain the level of detail required for land use planning at a community level, as well as more detailed implementation policies as required. Policy areas to be addressed include but are not limited to the distribution and density of population/housing, employment, community facilities, transportation, servicing, the natural heritage system, and the protection of the Duffin Rouge Agricultural preserve.

We hope that as a result of this initiative, the current uncertainty around the Seaton planning and development process, the associated land swap, and any doubts about the protection of the Ag Preserve will soon be resolved. (For further discussion of the history of this issue please reference past copies of the newsletter)

The Provincial Greenbelt Protection Process Act and Process

In December 2003, the Province introduced Bill 27, the proposed Greenbelt protection Act as the first step in establishing a permanent greenbelt in south central Ontario

stretching from Niagara Falls to Rice Lake. The study area includes Toronto, Hamilton, Durham, York, Peel, Halton, the Oak Ridges Moraine Plan area, the Niagara tender fruit and grape lands, and the Niagara Escarpment Plan area.

Bill 27 has yet to be passed but a Minister's zoning order has been put in place as an interim measure freezing rural areas from further urbanization for a year pending completion of the greenbelt exercise.

The Green belt Task Force appointed in January has just completed a discussion paper and is holding a series of day time workshops and evening public meetings and also soliciting written submissions (cut off date is mid July) to get input. Check the Ministry website (www.mah.gov.on.ca) for further info.

We are participating in these workshops and will be filing a more lengthy written submission. The Ministry is intending to develop firmer thoughts over the summer and engage in a further public process in the fall, with implementation and lifting of the freeze around year end.

It is difficult to know at this stage the amount of land that will end up being protected within the green belt. The most difficult questions relate to farmland. It would seem that specialty farm areas like the Niagara fruit belt and the Holland marsh will be protected. What protection is provided to prime agricultural areas (class 1-3, and associated lands), beyond that is a much tougher question.

Furthermore unless it is carefully linked to overall growth management strategy, the moratorium on development within the greenbelt could have the unintended consequence of pushing urban sprawl north. For example a development that could house up to 50,000 people is being proposed south of Alliston; there is a proposal in Bradford – West Gwillimbury to expand Bond Head into a town of 114,000 people over the next 30 years; and a proposal by the same corporation for an adult life style community of 7500 people at Innisfil south of Barrie.

Other Provincial Initiatives (Smart Growth, Plan Reform, Revision of the Provincial Policy Statement, (PPS) etc.

The Province has just announced proposed revisions to the Provincial Policy Statement (PPS), and will release a report on smart growth in the GTA plus Region in the next month. These actions, along with other planning and OMB reform initiatives, as well as the Greenbelt legislation mentioned above, will have an extremely important impact on growth management and farmland and natural area protection throughout the broader GTA plus Region.

Durham Conservation and GDA members will be participating actively in these public processes as they unfurl over this summer and fall.

Regional Official Plan Review Process

In our last newsletter we indicated that as part of its five year review Durham Regional Planning Department had produced a series of discussion papers which we had responded to and will continue to follow up on in the areas we indicated were of most interest and concern to us. (Again see the last news letter for more detail on these issues.)

It will be the fall before the Planning Department produces a further document inviting public comment and into next year before specific recommendations for changes to the Regional Official Plan will be made. The Provincial initiatives noted above have also lengthened this process since they will provide some of the framework within which changes to lower tier plans are made.

TRCA Trail Systems in the Walker Woods and Glen Major

The trail systems in these lands have been completed as shown on the trail guide and map. Local residents, who are or will be DCA members, have been recruited to act as “trail captains” of sections of the trails system. It will be their responsibility to monitor usage and undertake minor maintenance tasks. When there is a major issue to deal with, like a major tree fall, they will have access to TRCA personnel who will have the resources to deal with the problem.

TRCA plans to build a parking lot on their lands at the 7th concession and the townline this summer if all approvals can be obtained. This lot will provide a safe place to park and a controlled access point for users. A kiosk similar to the one already in place at the Housten Road parking lot will be erected to provide trails information to potential users.

TRCA also plans to investigate the potential for trails on their lands between the 6th concession and Brock Road, and on the TRCA’s Osler lands south of the Town line this summer. DCA members will play an important part in this initiative.

Trans Canada Trail

The Trans Canada Trail has been signed and mapped through the TRCA lands from the town line to Housten road and the microwave tower on Concession 7. All agreements are in place to implement the next section in the next 2-3 months, north through the Regional forest, north over Durham 21 between concessions 7 and Durham 23 through the Miller lands and north along concession 8 north of Reid Road.

The interim route north to the Town of Uxbridge will traverse Brookdale Road and concession 7. However through a combination of land agreements, donations and purchases we are hopeful that an almost completely off road link running east from Elgin Park and the Town of Uxbridge, to the unopened 8th concession and south will be able to be secured shortly, with work on implementation beginning soon.

An event is being planned in September to officially open the Trans Canada Trail in Durham.

Uxbridge Naturally

Uxbridge Naturally is an initiative between the Township of Uxbridge with the active leadership of Mayor O'Connor and conservationists to develop a rural strategy for the township focusing on protecting and extending natural areas and trail linkages. In support of this effort the Township has also appointed two trail committees, the Trans Canada Trail Committee, and a Town Trail committee. This focus encompasses many of Durham Conservation's priorities and as a result many Durham Conservation members are highly involved in this effort, and with these township committees.

A key [priority is to create off road trail connections extending from the heart of communities and in particular the town of Uxbridge to the large network of countryside trails including the trans Canada and Oak Ridges Trail and TRCA and Regional Trail networks as well as other yet to be developed trails. Combined with this effort is an effort to create a network of linked trails within the Town of Uxbridge itself. One of these town Trails has already been opened; another will be opened in June; and work is proceeding on others.

Federal Green Space Lands / GTAA Master Planning Process

As noted in our last newsletter, 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 7500 acre federal green Space lands to the Minister late last fall, and other stakeholder groups over the past 4 months.

Broader public meetings have yet to be held. The hold up at the moment is that no real determination on where we go from here will occur until some months after a Federal election. The concern beyond that relates to whether or not the incoming Government will be prepared to commit any financial resources to begin plan implementation. Before the past election the Government announced its commitment to preserving the Green Space lands and appointing a committee to recommend how such a commitment might be implemented. It would be unfortunate indeed if after making such a commitment Government was unwilling to make the modest financial and resource commitment necessary to ensure at least some of the recommendations particularly those aimed at natural area rehabilitation, recreational trail development, and further action to revitalize the existing residential and farm community were not pursued.

With respect to the GTAA Master Planning Process the Master Plan publication has been delayed from the spring to the fall of 2004. Preliminary indications are that the runways will be sited on the south east portion of the airport lands avoiding the main branch of the west Duffin.

Following Master Plan completion there will be a multi year Environmental assessment process after which the Federal Government will make a final decision on whether and how to proceed.

We believe that one of the greatest obstacles to proceeding will be whether or not development of a Regional Airport at Pickering can be demonstrated to be financially viable within the next few decades, given the investment at Pearson and future prospects for air traffic growth given the shocks of the last 3 years. This raises the question of whether the best course of action might be to delay any costly environmental assessment process for a decade or so until prospects that the airport can be viable have improved.

Proposed Berrywoods Farm development in Greenwood

Runnymede Development and Tribute homes are proposing a 381 home development on large lots on a 196 ha. Property on both sides of Westney Road at the south east edge of Greenwood. This development of some 1200 people would quadruple the size of the existing community. The existing Official Plan Greenwood calls for Greenwood to grow by some 225 residents over the next 13 years.

Durham Regional Planning Committee held a meeting on May 11 at which speakers from the Greenwood area registered their strong opposition to the proposal.

Pickering Council has chosen not to deal with the proposal since the development falls within the land covered by the Province's Greenbelt protection Act and development freeze. The Region is continuing to process applications until the new law is passed. As a result Regional Planning staff will make recommendations to Planning Committee before the Committee decides whether to send it on to full Council.

Durham Conservation and the Green Door Alliance will be evaluating this proposal and in all likelihood actively supporting the Greenwood community in opposing this application.