

Green Door Alliance



The Honourable John Gerretsen
Minister of Municipal affairs and Housing,

March 15 2005

Dear Minister,

We applaud your and the Premier's commitment to implementing the Greenbelt Plan and in particular the commitment to include the Duffin Rouge Agricultural Preserve within the greenbelt.

However we were absolutely dismayed by the City of Pickering's recent action to release agricultural easements on the Preserve. The organization I represent – the Green Door Alliance, (GDA), played an instrumental role in the late 1990's in first convincing the Region, and through them other parties including ORC and Pickering, to place easements on these lands before sale. The GDA were parties in the Ontario Municipal Board process that resulted in the Tripartite Agreement signed between ORC, the Region, and the City of Pickering which required easements which ran 'in perpetuity' to be placed on the Pickering Ag. lands as a condition of their sale. And although we were not signatories to that agreement, we signed off on the Minutes of Settlement on the understanding that the tripartite agreement protecting the Preserve lands had been entered into.

By releasing the easements the City has ridden roughshod over this agreement. Not only that but, by releasing the easements, Pickering has released development rights – a public asset that could be worth some \$300,000 per acre, if at some point in future the Greenbelt boundary were shifted and Pickering were to implement its growth Management Plan which calls for developing some 1500 acres in the Ag. Preserve. And in return Pickering tells us the City and its residents will receive some \$ 2.5 million with the additional promise of another 'minimum' \$60 million should the land be developed in future.

What a deal! After releasing a public asset that could net private interests over \$ 400 million for the 1500 acres in question, these private interests may be 'generously' prepared to give back \$ 60 million of what should have been the public's money anyway, to Pickering and its citizens! I say 'may' because there are clauses in the Minutes of Settlement between Pickering and these private owners, (clause 9 on page 4, and clause 7 of the Financial Agreement on page 13), which appear to indicate that given the Province is proceeding with the Greenbelt Plan prohibiting development on these lands, the easements will be released and any agreement to give back \$ 60 million to Pickering will be voided! So it sounds to us like even the \$60 million may be smoke and mirrors!

Directors

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The Province may feel that given these lands are in the Greenbelt there is nothing to worry about. The land will remain in agriculture and private interests won't be able to cash in on what was a public asset. However given the immense amount of money involved, we and many in the public are concerned that in future some government might blink. At the very least it will create a situation of continuing public unease and a situation where private interests will continue to employ very aggressive tactics in pushing for development of these lands. In addition it will be in the interests of these private owners to let the land deteriorate, and resist any effort by the Province to encourage agricultural viability on these lands.

And by aggressive tactics I mean aggressive! Past action including the many costly full page newspaper ads taken out in the past election to besmirch and defeat those standing in the way of Ag. Preserve development, up to and including the actions of recent weeks, are just a few examples of the extreme pressure this influence has placed on the political and decision making process.

We believe that if the Province does not take strong action against the City's unconscionable actions this will be taken as a sign of weakness and an invitation to further aggressive action by these private interests.

It was a Provincial body – the ORC that six short years ago sold land at agricultural values – some \$ 4,000 per acre - based on an understanding that this land was to remain agricultural in perpetuity. The City cannot be perceived as getting away with trashing this agreement, and not only that, but worse still, taking actions which will open the possibility that private interests could gain hugely at public expense should greenbelt boundaries ever change. Provincial silence would send a message that they have no problem with Pickering's action.

The Province has shown great strength on the Greenbelt and in our minds was initially unfairly treated in some of the media accounts when these same private interests tried to tar the Government and suggest it succumbed to pressure when in reality it remained firm.

In recent days however, the media and the public generally are increasingly supporting the Government here, and will we believe strongly support the Province in further action to protect these lands.

Please intervene in this process. The Green Door Alliance signed off as a party to the OMB appeal concerning the Province's disposal of the land in 1999 because we felt confident that there was an agreement in place committed to by the Province, and the Region, as well as Pickering, calling for the land to remain in agriculture 'in perpetuity'. We urge you to stand behind this commitment.

Sincerely,

Brian Buckles, on behalf of the Green Door Alliance
(Phone 905 649 3331, e-mail Buckles@total.net)

c.c. Brad Duguid, John Burke, Bryan Kozman