

News Letter

Following is an update of the activities of Conservation Durham and its sister organization the Green Door Alliance. A number of GDA Directors and Patrons are also active in Conservation Durham. The GDA has charitable status and operates primarily as a research organization. It has a strong focus on the federally and provincially owned lands. Conservation Durham has engaged in a broader range of activities including building membership, fundraising, newsletter preparation, and a very active presence at OMB hearings where we continue to oppose development applications which threaten to further sprawl in Durham Region.

The two organizations are continuing to explore how they can complement each other.

Provincial Moraine Plan Implementation

In order to implement the Provincial Moraine legislation and Plan, the Regions and Municipalities are required to bring their plans into conformity with the Provincial Plan. The current deadline for this is the fall of 2003.

We strongly support the Moraine Plan. However some problems have emerged that need correcting. As the Plan now stands for example, farmers in Moraine areas classified as core/linkage areas would not be able to erect barns, and individual landowners could not be able to erect detached buildings or facilities such as garages, swimming pools or ponds etc. In addition businesses such as for example Pleasure Valley have their existing use grandfathered, but are unable to build another structure to support that use.

There is a consensus emerging among provincial and municipal officials that the Plan needs to be modified to remove such restrictions and simplify the process individuals would have to go through to request such changes without undermining the overall conservation goal. We very much support this effort and expect the Province will announce a clarification over the summer.

Seaton Land Swap/Agricultural Preserve lands

The Green Door Alliance has worked to protect the Pickering Agricultural Preserve for years and originated the proposal for easement protection. They (we), oppose the initiative by the City of Pickering to undertake a Growth Management Study funded by developers that will almost certainly recommend development of at least some of these lands. Other environmental groups – in particular the Rouge/Duffin Green Space Coalition – also oppose urbanization of the Agricultural Preserve.

The Province opposes the City action, and recently intervened by imposing a Ministers Zoning Order to permanently protect the Agricultural Preserve and take responsibility for developing a secondary Plan for the adjacent Seaton lands. The Province took this position because the Province, the Region and the City had signed an agreement in 1999 which called for the Agricultural Preserve land to be

sold to tenants at agricultural prices (some \$4,000 per acre), and for easements to be registered on title requiring them to remain in agriculture 'in perpetuity'. The Region as well recently reaffirmed its support of the Regional Official Plan position to maintain the Agricultural Preserve lands and not develop them. Meanwhile the City is proceeding with the Growth Management Study and the Province has yet to take further action. The battle has intensified, with the City Mayor Wayne Arthurs accepting the Liberal nomination to run against Janet Ecker in the forthcoming election.

Supporters of development of the Agricultural Preserve have circulated full page newspaper ads attacking Janet Ecker for trampling the rights of farmers to sell their land. Opponents of developing the Agricultural preserve including ourselves see this as a cynical distortion of the facts, since the vast majority of the Agricultural Preserve lands are now controlled by a couple of developers - who stand to make an immense gain if thousands of acres sold for \$ 4,000 an acre can be rezoned for development and be worth well in excess of \$100,000 an acre.

Meanwhile as a result of the controversy, development plans for Seaton seem in limbo. And the status of the land swap - in which some 1300 acres in Uxbridge including Gan Eden and land in Richmond Hill were to be given up by developers in return for land in Seaton - has been delayed.

Regarding Seaton, the Province has recently completed studies that indicate more than half the Seaton lands will be preserved for environmental reasons along with a further yet to be determined percentage aimed at heritage protection and buffering existing communities. We generally support this approach provided Seaton is developed as a smart growth, live/work, transit friendly community.

Federal Green Space Lands

Last fall Transport Canada appointed a Green Space Stewardship Advisory Committee to assist in developing a Management Plan to protect the 5500 acres of Moraine land and the 2000 acre Alternate Rouge Corridor. The Committee membership includes some 10 representatives from the Municipal, Regional and Conservation organizations, including the Green Door Alliance.

Final recommendations will be made to the Minister in late 2003. The key issues being faced include how best to balance natural area protection/enhancement, encourage agriculture and enhance best farming practices; protect/enhance the existing cultural/community character; allow for some public uses including trails; and recommend how best to structure a stewardship organization to oversee these lands in future.

Greater Toronto Airports Authority (GTAA)

The GTAA is continuing the process of developing a Master Plan for a Regional Airport on the Pickering lands and have held a series of public sessions on particular aspects of airport planning over the past number of months. The Master Plan will not be completed until early in 2004, and before that it is unlikely that the public will have any information on critical issues such as the proposed size and nature of operation, runway alignment, noise impacts etc. We are also very interested in passenger forecasts and financial justification.

Once the Master Plan is completed, a multi-year Federal Environmental Assessment Process involving public hearings will be undertaken before the Government makes a final decision. In the meantime we are concerned that housing stock, barns, fences and farming services are deteriorating as demolitions continue and the site is depopulated.

The Trans Canada Trail

Conservation Durham members are highly involved in many trail initiatives in the area, as members of Uxbridge and Pickering chapters of the Trans Canada Trail; sitting on TRCA committees; and through involvement with the 'Uxbridge naturally' initiative discussed further below.

With respect to the TRCA lands, Trans Canada Trail signing including the erection of 'you are here' sign posts will be completed over the next 2 months, and a Trail Guide and map will be available to the public by the mid summer. A close to final draft is attached for your interest.

Current Plans call for the completion of further sections of the Trans Canada trail northwards from the TRCA lands towards the Town of Uxbridge by this fall.

Conservation Authority Lands

The TRCA will have completed its Management Planning exercise for TRCA lands in the Duffin headwaters by the early summer. Following this a number of stewardship committees will be set up. We plan to be very involved in these organizations, and in working with the TRCA to support further strategic extension of these lands where significant opportunities arise.

Johnson OMB Hearing

In March of 2003 the Pickering Committee of Adjustment approved a minor variance to allow the Johnsons dwelling access along the Town Line. The TRCA, the City of Pickering, and Conservation Durham have appealed this decision to the OMB. Uxbridge Township will also be a party to the hearing. Grounds for appeal are numerous. Most importantly we and others are concerned that the decision is not in conformity with the Provincial Moraine Plan and will involve further destruction along the town line to allow for emergency vehicle access etc. The appeal date is expected to be in September..

Uxbridge Naturally

Uxbridge Naturally is an initiative between the Town 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. Conservation Durham will be working closely with this group over the next 6 months in the effort to secure funding from public agencies and private sources to secure high priority conservation lands and implement the vision of creating trail linkages which connect the communities to the network of countryside trails. This group is also involved in developing a Plan for the 1300-acre Cortellucci land holding that should fall under public ownership soon.

More will be said about Uxbridge Naturally in our fall news letter.

Managed Forest Property Tax

In the past, Managed Forests have been given the same property tax treatment as farmland. However the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC), has revised the assessment for Managed Forest properties and commencing in 2004 will assess them based on current value using a 'sale comparison' approach. The Ontario Woodlot Association and the Ontario Forestry Association are very concerned with this change. It's hard to believe that this won't result in considerably higher assessments for managed forests on the urban fringe. Many of our members have properties on the Moraine and in

core/linkage areas where the Province wants to promote environmental values. Yet by this change, the Province seems to be saying that if you have marginal farmland in such an area, you'd be better off keeping it in farmland rather than planting trees because if you plant trees your property tax will go up! As these Associations state: "Future tree planting initiatives to address watershed management, climate change and other environmental values will be jeopardized because farmers will be unwilling to take marginal farmlands out of production if they are faced with increased property assessment for forest lands." We urge you to write your local MPP and Janet Ecker, (if they are not one and the same), and urge that the government instruct MPAC to develop valuation procedures that treat farmland and managed forest in a similar fashion and in a fashion consistent with the government's promise to woodlot owners in 1997.

Conservation Easements

Many members of Conservation Durham and the Green Door Alliance in Uxbridge, North Pickering and West Scugog have donated conservation easements on their land. We continue to encourage this means of further protecting these areas.

Contact Brian Buckles or Michael Tucker for further information on this issue.

Ontario Farmland Trust

While the charter of the Green Door Alliance Inc. allows it to operate as a land Trust and hold land or easements it was decided not to do so. However GDA Director, Kathryn Dean, helped by Director Bruce Flattery and the University of Guelph Center for Land Stewardship are incorporating the Ontario Farmland Trust. We recognize that conservation of our countryside includes farms as well as woodlots, wetlands and river valleys.

407 Extension

The Provincial Environmental Assessment process for the extension of Highway 407 east to Hwys.35/115 with two free links to the 401 is continuing. The Draft Terms of Reference have been released for public comment (until July 31st, 2003) and are available at: www.407eastea.com. Regardless of concerns about the 407 expansion contributing to sprawl, there is seemingly little chance of completely halting expansion. However, there are ways in which we could influence the extent of the expansion and the location of the 401 links. In particular we want to lobby for a high level crossing of the East Duffins north of Greenwood that will provide a generous north/south wildlife corridor and a Trans Canada Trail link.

Smart Growth

The Green Door Alliance has been very active over the past few years promoting Smart Growth. We have produced two reports on the subject, one a more technical paper as part of a provincial submission, the other for broader circulation for which we received a \$5,000 donation from the Richard Ivey Foundation for printing and distribution.

Smart Growth is the conservation challenge of the future without which much of our GTA and Durham countryside will disappear. While the Provincial Moraine Plan has a major positive influence on the Moraine, we have been disappointed by the broader Provincial response to date, as outlined in the Central Ontario Smart Growth Panel Report of April 2003, and by the lack of progress made in the review of the Provincial Policy Statement (PPS) which is a major factor in influencing Regional Plans and OMB decisions.

The Region will shortly be releasing a series of staff papers and requesting public comment as part of the Official Plan Review process due for completion in early 2004. This will provide an important opportunity for our input.

Finally we are also extensively involved in networking with other non government organizations (NGO's), on the promotion of Smart Growth and on the creation of a stronger network to share information, lobby for change etc. The next few months before the Provincial election are an opportune time to push strongly for further action.

Brian Buckles for: The Green Door Alliance and Conservation Durham
July, 2003