

## Newsletter March 2023

### Things have been busy since our last update!

**Bill 23 and 39:** These two Bills passed in December in a rushed manner with almost no consultation. They contain significant changes to the planning process to address the urgent need to improve the supply of affordable and diverse housing. Some of the changes will remove barriers to increasing housing density where it is needed - close to services, transit and existing infrastructure. In large urban areas such as Toronto and Ottawa many agree the changes were needed.

There are questions, though, about how some of the changes will lead to more **affordable** and **diverse** housing being built **quickly**, and about how the costs will be covered. And as you have no doubt been following in the media coverage, many of the changes seem to be supporting the kinds of development which contribute to sprawl and using more land. The dust is still settling on these questions but there is almost universal agreement that removing lands from the Greenbelt is not necessary to achieve these aims.

As you may recall, the largest acreage and most contentious lands targeted for removal lie in northwest Pickering. These roughly 4700 acres in Duffins Rouge Agricultural Preserve were originally expropriated by the Province and later sold with agricultural easements in place which restricted their use. GDA has had a long involvement in protecting these lands for agriculture, natural heritage preservation and sustainable development. Bill 23 removed these lands from the Greenbelt and also removed other protections which were in place for these lands. Bill 39 removed the agricultural easements and sets the stage for current landowners to develop the lands for housing. You can read more about some of the current landowners here: [Who are the GTA developers set to benefit from Ford government's Greenbelt land swap? | CBC News](#). The government has indicated that these lands will be returned to the Greenbelt if certain timelines for housing development are not met.

We and other groups and individuals have been focusing our efforts on these lands. We want these lands to remain in agriculture as they are part of a larger agricultural system in this area – in the Rouge National Urban Park, on nearby federal lands and on adjacent lands in Markham. They also act as an important buffer to protect the Park, in which significant public investments have been made by federal, provincial and municipal governments. And we have stated in our submissions that public, and not private interests, should receive all or the majority of the value of these lands, estimated at \$1 billion or more.

**Our actions to date:** We've reviewed the Rouge National Urban Parks Act and there are points of leverage the Federal government could use to protect the Park if development were to take place in the Preserve. We've spoken to federal Parks officials, to federal MPs and written to the federal Minister of the Environment. We've met with Environmental Defence and other groups such as the Ontario Farmland Trust to coordinate and maximize our collective efforts. A number of us have participated in a submission to the Auditor General of Ontario (sent February 23 and posted here on our website: [Green-Durham-Association-Submission-to-Auditor-General\\_02\\_23\\_2023.pdf \(greendurham.ca\)](#)). We recently retained a reputable environmental lawyer to help us analyze the role we can play in protecting these lands. We have filed a Municipal Freedom of Information Request with the City of Pickering to determine whether any agricultural easements are still held by the City of Pickering post-DRAPRA. We want to be sure we have done everything we can.

**Durham Region** Planning at the regional level is in a state of disarray. Changes imposed by Bill 23 will remove the coordinating role of Planning at the Region level and instead place this with the Province. At

the same time, the draft Official Plan is now available for review and comment and it contains some concerning and conflicting proposals and aims:

1: In its 2020 review of the Ontario Growth Plan, the Province chose to significantly reduce minimum density requirements from 80 to 50 residents and jobs per acre, and to reduce the previous requirement, that a minimum of 60 % of all residential development occur within the existing built-up area, to 50%. In Durham Region there would have been no need for urban area expansion to meet community land needs had the previous density requirements been maintained.

2: You may recall that last year a public process took place to determine the amount of additional land needed to build housing. Five scenarios were researched and presented by the Planning department, and Scenario 4 was recommended to Council, adding an additional **2348** acres of land for development outside the current urban boundaries to meet development needs 2021 to 2051, making a total of **14,350** acres available in Durham Region for housing development.

Instead, Council approved a scenario introduced by the development industry which was not researched by the Planning department, not presented to the public, and which adds about **6000** more acres of new community land to the current urban boundaries, designating a future growth area of **18,179** acres of prime farmland and natural heritage areas. The figures presented in this scenario do not tally, the Planning department has stated that the figures used in this scenario do not tally, and that services and infrastructure cannot be provided as efficiently or meet the Region's current policies and obligations for sustainable development.

It is a complex stew of uncertainty. There is indeed an urgent need for getting housing built over the next decade. One solution is to take action to increase Growth Plan Standards and density in existing urban areas in order to create much more affordable diverse housing, including rental housing close to employment and amenities. The recent planning changes imposed by the Province also mean that municipalities will play a strong role and they need both our scrutiny and support.

A reasonable summary of some of the concerns about the draft Official Plan can be found in the submission to the Auditor General (see link above). We will be submitting our comments to the Region and you can too, they are due by April 3, 2023. If you aren't sure what to say or how to start, get in touch at [info@greendurham.ca](mailto:info@greendurham.ca) and we can send you our draft notes. Another source of information about the draft Official Plan is [Advancing Complete Communities | Stop Sprawl Durham](#).

Why, you may ask, should you bother sending comments if they weren't heeded last time round? It is a different Council this time and perhaps they can be convinced to change the Land Use Scenario for Durham. We know the Region does not support the removal of the Preserve lands from the Greenbelt in Durham. We know Pickering Council changed its stance on this matter as well. And these are important decisions which will have implications for natural heritage and agricultural lands, for climate change, for efficient use of resources, for affordable housing and for the taxes we all pay. To make comments about the draft Durham Region Official Plan click here to learn how: [Envision Durham - Region of Durham](#)

**Provincial lands project** – We continue to work behind the scenes to achieve our goal of having the 1300 acres currently owned by Infrastructure Ontario transferred for trails and conservation purposes. While we wait for word from the Province, we are working on negotiating trail connections with adjacent landowners. Thanks to a collaborative spirit of the landowners and the support of Uxbridge Township, this process is going well. GDA board member John McCutcheon donated his land to Uxbridge Township to form an important connection in this project and the land donation process is complete. A private citizen stepped forward to purchase a key lot which could provide an ideal trail connection to trails in the Town. Two lots were created and have been sold, the middle strip donated to the Town as a future trail. The Town has now adopted a trails strategy as part of their strategic plan and a task group has been formed. Several skilled and knowledgeable friends to GDA have given generously of their time to help

along the way. A couple of pleasant days have been spent, scoping out possible trail routes. We keep moving forward one small step at a time.

**Paid parking in trail areas south of Uxbridge:** This project was implemented last July by the Town of Uxbridge to generate funds for trail maintenance. It will remain in the pilot phase until later this year. GDA is part of an advisory group to guide the implementation of this project and how the funds will be spent. We have put forward two spending suggestions which have been accepted. Re-construction of a popular bridge at the south end of Glen Major Forest and along the Townline will take place first thing this Spring. TRCA will complete the work, funds from the parking fees will cover 60% of the roughly \$60,000 it will cost to build the bridge, and GDA and Durham Mountain Biking Association will share in covering the remaining 40%. Second, the \$10,000 yearly support GDA has been giving to TRCA to assist with mowing costs will now be covered by this fund.

The arrangement GDA made with the Township to waive parking charges for GDA members remains in place. If you are parking in one of the lots which has paid parking signs, you can use the code TRAILS23 when you are prompted by the 4PAY app. If you are a regular volunteer and would prefer to obtain a yearly pass (with a pass you don't need to use the app each time you park), all you need to do is email Heather Gayman at [hgayman@uxbridge.ca](mailto:hgayman@uxbridge.ca) and copy [info@greendurham.ca](mailto:info@greendurham.ca). Provide your licence plate and mention you are a GDA member and volunteer. And remember that parking is still permitted and free at the smaller pullovers along the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Concession trail access stepovers.

**Federal grant** The grant we received from the federal government has ended and we have sent our final report. It allowed us to complete one major project replacing a boardwalk. We were able to partially complete replacement of a second boardwalk until winter weather intervened. We will complete the work once the trails dry up later this spring. The grant allowed us to purchase equipment to help with our trail work and stretches the funds which have been donated to GDA.

(Note the great chainsaw technique being demonstrated by this volunteer who took the chainsaw safety training course!)



**Other trail projects** Late last fall some of you helped create a bypass trail which removed a nasty eroded hill and sharp corner. The new trail has been a fabulous addition for skiers and cyclists.

**Thanks to all of you for your donations, your words of encouragement at this busy time and for your membership.**