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Greenbelt Council's Progress Report 2009

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November 30, 2009

Honourable Jim Watson
Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing
777 Bay Street, 17th Floor
Toronto, ON M5G 2E5

Subject: **Greenbelt Council's Progress Report – Highlights 2009**

Dear Minister:

I am pleased to provide you with the Greenbelt Council's year end report for 2009. The attachment to this letter provides an overview of our activities of the past year.

2009 has been a very productive year for the Greenbelt Council and we tackled a lot of timely and interesting matters as they pertain to the Greenbelt.

Council was pleased to welcome our newest member, Dennis Yellowlees, in July. He brings a much needed farmer's agricultural perspective to our meetings. I am also pleased that Virginia Maclaren, John Middleton, and Clay Switzer have all been re-appointed for an additional year. I appreciate the continuity that these members bring to our meetings with their knowledge and awareness of many Greenbelt issues. As you know, I have agreed to carry on as Chair and have accepted a one year a re-appointment with my term ending in June, 2010.

Howie Herrema, our former Vice Chair retired from Council in June. His contributions to Council were particularly insightful because he brought a number of different perspectives to our meetings being a farmer living on the Greenbelt, who is a former Uxbridge Township Councillor and who is now a Durham Regional Councillor. We wish him all the best in his future endeavours and we will miss him.

Council has been very vocal about raising a variety of concerns this year and we have provided advice to you and your government on a variety of Greenbelt related issues that was often beyond the mandate of your ministry. Because of this, Council felt it needed to establish a protocol that would set out its expectations with respect to a reasonable timeframe by which your colleagues should respond to our letters of advice as they pertain to their particular mandates.

We wanted to make sure not only was our advice received but that we wanted to know how it was being dealt with by your colleagues. We thank you and your staff for helping to get this protocol in place. It has helped to facilitate some interesting feedback and in some cases direct action by your government.

Council has always felt it important that they have an understanding of the various issues, trends and activities that could have an impact on the Greenbelt. Since our inception in 2005, we have continued to invite a variety of speakers to our regular meetings to help keep us informed and aware of current thinking, of the activities of other organizations, and of new government initiatives with a view to how



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these could benefit the Greenbelt.

For example, this year we heard from Gord Miller, Ontario's Environmental Commissioner, Charles Garrad, Past President, Ontario Archaeology Society, Donald Ziraldo and Dr. Jim Brandle of the Vineland Research and Innovation Centre, representatives from Ontario Farmland Trust, as well as a number of local food experts.

Council continued to hear from provincial representatives throughout the year which allowed us to provide input into several of your government's initiatives such as the Green Energy Act, Lake Simcoe Strategic Vision for Growth, the report on Protecting Niagara Tender Fruit and Grape Lands and the GTA–Niagara and the GTA-West Transportation initiatives, to name a few. Council is presently discussing and considering the latest presentations on GTA-Niagara and GTA-West initiatives.

Council has had many discussions about the wine and grape growing issues in the Niagara Region. We provided you and your government with advice voicing our concerns about the LCBO practices regarding VQA wines and other comparable government policies that we felt worked against the sustainability of this industry.

We were pleased to see the government's October announcement about its intent to focus on VQA wines, including greater access in LCBO stores and the VQA wine support program, among other matters. We applaud your government for announcing these initiatives that will contribute to and showcase an important part of the Greenbelt particularly in Niagara.

We also appreciated your help in arranging for our recent meeting with the Honourable Leona Dombrowsky, Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. It has always been Council's view that, having given special designation to the farmland in the Greenbelt, the Province should adopt a specific strategy to support farming in the Greenbelt. This meeting with the Minister was a good start but we consider the Greenbelt agricultural issues as a work in progress.

Council has continued to work closely with ministry staff on putting in place a performance monitoring framework for the Greenbelt Plan. As you know this ongoing and important project is part of our terms of reference and will help set the stage for the ten year review of the Greenbelt Plan.

Virginia Maclaren has been providing her expertise and guidance to ministry staff throughout the duration of this project on Council's behalf. We understand that ministry staff held municipal stakeholder workshops during November to receive input on this draft framework and a set of sample performance indicators. John Middleton attended the session held in Vineland. Council also provided their comments and feedback at various times during this year.

I am pleased to report that our Greenbelt Council web pages are regularly updated to include new appointments, minutes from every Greenbelt Council meeting, all of our letters of advice as well as the respective responses from yourself and your colleagues. We have always felt it important that Council's activities be reported in an open and transparent manner that communicates our work clearly to the public and others. The Council web pages are a good tool to ensure that we continue to operate in an open and transparent manner.

I would like to personally thank you and your staff for your continued support and especially for making yourself accessible to myself and Council members. We appreciate that you always make an effort to drop in on our meetings to hear from us directly. Council looks forward to continue working with you and your staff.

In closing, I would also like to thank ministry staff and our Executive Coordinator Bill Winegard for their hard work and continuing support and dedication over the last year.

Sincerely,

Dr. Robert Elgie
Chair

Attachment

- [Attachment: Progress Report Details \(November 30, 2009\)](#)
- [Minister's response to the 2009 Greenbelt Council Progress Report](#)

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Greenbelt Council Advice :

Over the past year the Greenbelt Council has provided advice to the government on a range of issues related to the Greenbelt. Many of the issues that Council has been concerned with deal with agriculture, including wine and grape growing in the Niagara Region, and tax assessment policies for on-farm facilities in the Greenbelt.

We are pleased to report that Council has continued to build on existing working relationships with other provincial ministries. Such relationships have given us the opportunity to invite staff from other ministries to discuss specific initiatives with us and to reinforce our role as an advisory body to the government. The protocol we established last year has helped to facilitate more timely consideration of Council's advice by other provincial ministries.

These discussions have given us insight into broader government initiatives which has enabled us to provide advice regarding such initiatives and their potential impacts on the Greenbelt.

Green Energy Act:

- In April of this year the Greenbelt Council advised the government that it supports the intent of the Green Energy Act (GEA), which received Royal Assent on May 14, 2009.
- Further to that statement, Council asked that any special or sensitive areas in the Greenbelt receive careful consideration when regulating the siting of Green Energy facilities in the Greenbelt.
- Council wanted to make the government aware that while we are supportive of Green Energy and the progressive move the government has made with the Green Energy Act, we wanted to ensure that the integrity of the Greenbelt remains intact in the process.

Performance monitoring framework for the Greenbelt Plan

- Section 5.9 of the Greenbelt Plan states that the "Greenbelt Council will also provide input and advice on the identification and establishment of performance measures..."
- In accordance to our Terms of Reference, Council has provided their input primarily through Virginia Maclaren who has met with MMAH staff regularly throughout the year and provided her insight and expertise into the initiative.
- In May 2009, Council advised the government that we felt this work was ready for the next step – consultation with relevant municipalities and key stakeholders.
- Since then ministry staff, with assistance from Council, has finalized the draft Greenbelt performance monitoring framework and a set of draft indicators. Staff held municipal-stakeholder workshops during November to gather feedback on the framework.



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Wine and grape growing issues in the Niagara Region

- Council has been discussing the issues being faced by wine makers and grape growers in the Niagara Region. A wine-maker herself, Donna Lailey, Vice Chair of the Council, has been particularly vocal about these issues and has spoken to Council at various times throughout the year about her concerns.
- In July 2009, Council wrote a letter of advice to the government voicing our concerns over certain policies of the Ontario Government and the LCBO that we feel work against the sustainability of the industry. Included in this is the Wine Content and Labelling Act, Wine Labelling in LCBO stores, and support for the distribution of VQA wines in LCBO stores.
- The letter was forwarded to the Ministry of Small Business and Entrepreneurship (MSBE), the Ministry of Government Services (MGS), and the Ministry of Finance (MOF).
- Minister McMeekin, MCS, and Minister Duncan, MOF, responded to Council's concerns. Minister Dombrowsky (OMAFRA) discussed these issues with Council when we met with her on October 22.
- On October 13 2009, the Ministry of Consumer Services (MCS) announced it will be focusing the entire wine and grape industry on producing VQA wines as part of the government's overall strategy for placing greater emphasis on VQA wines, which both wineries and growers have agreed is the future of the industry.
- The government's plan includes increasing consumer access to VQA wines through the LCBO and renewing both the VQA wine support program and the marketing program for Ontario VQA wines, and ensuring clearer labeling and signage for all Ontario wines.
- On October 5 2009, Donna Lailey, Vice-Chair of the Greenbelt Council and a member of the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation, met with Deputy Amin (MMAH & MCS) to discuss the sustainability of the grape growing industry in Niagara Region.

Property tax assessment policies for on-farm facilities

- In July, 2009, Council wrote a letter of advice requesting a review of existing property tax assessment policies related to facilities for the on-farm processing and the on-farm sale of farm-grown products in the Greenbelt.
- This was to follow up on advice we provided in 2007 on the same issue. We are concerned that no action has been taken regarding support for on-farm value-added and farm-grown products.
- In its letter of advice, Council recommended that the government consider assessing on-farm value-added facilities at the farmland tax rate instead of industrial or commercial rates.
- Minister Watson forwarded this advice to Minister Dombrowsky, OMAFRA and Minister Duncan, MOF. While we have received a response from Minister Dombrowsky, Council has not received a response from Minister Duncan.

Development of archaeological attractions in the Greenbelt

- In June 2009, Council had the opportunity to discuss archaeology and heritage planning in the Greenbelt with Charles Garrad, Past President, Ontario Archaeology Society, and Dr. Ron Williamson, President, Archaeological Services Inc.
- Council feels strongly that heritage planning and development of archaeological attractions in the Greenbelt will increase the value of the Greenbelt by retaining important reminders of past cultures in Ontario.
- In October 2009, Council recommended that the government, though the Ministry of Culture, adopt a plan to identify high priority archaeological sites in the Greenbelt, to develop and promote those sites as cultural and tourist attractions and to complete archaeological work on these sites. Council also recommended that the government link this initiative to the implementation of the Greenbelt Plan.

Implementation of Greenbelt Act and Plan:

- Throughout the year, Council has been receiving updates regarding the implementation of the Greenbelt Plan and Act through regular presentations and discussions from MMAH staff, along with staff from other provincial Ministries and those in other organizations.
- Several times throughout the year MAH staff has updated Council on the Greenbelt Plan

performance monitoring framework.

- Staff from the Ministry of Transportation (MTO) has continued discussions with the Council by attending Council meetings throughout the year. MTO has been seeking Council feedback on the GTA West Corridor & GTA-Niagara Corridor Planning study and the considerations of the Greenbelt in the Environmental Assessment (EA) process. Council is presently discussing and considering the latest presentation on these two initiatives.
- In March 2009, Council heard from Ontario's Environmental Commissioner, Gord Miller, regarding his thoughts on the Environmental Assessment process, the land use planning process in Ontario, the Places to Grow Plan and the Greenbelt Plan.
- In May 2009, staff from the Ministry of Environment (MOE) gave an overview to Council on the Green Energy Act and proposed regulations.
- In June 2009, Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure staff from the Growth Secretariat gave an overview of the "Strategic Vision for Growth" in the Simcoe Area which had been recently released for public comment.
- In June 2009, Council had a presentation and discussion on archaeology and heritage planning in the Greenbelt with Charles Garrad, Past President, Ontario Archaeology Society, and Dr. Ron Williamson, President, Archaeological Services Inc.
- In September 2009, staff from Ontario Farmland Trust spoke to Council about their "Places to Grow...Food" Campaign, part of a major three-year education and outreach campaign with the goal of helping to ensure that farmland remains in farming.

Promotion and Outreach:

- Donald Ziraldo, Chair, Board of Directors, Vineland Research and Innovation Centre and Dr. Jim Brandle, Chief Executive Officer, Vineland Research and Innovation Centre spoke to Council in January about the history, vision and values of the Vineland Research Station.
- Throughout the earlier part of the year, MAH staff discussed with Council a possible Minister's Greenbelt Award Program. Council provided feedback on the various components of the proposed award program, including suggestions on potential award categories.
- Following up with OMAFRA's 2008 study on the use of agricultural land trust arrangements (e.g. easements) in Niagara, Council was given the opportunity to provide input on Wayne Caldwell's draft report: "Protecting Niagara Tender Fruit and Grape Lands". A number of Council members participated in the final presentation of the report.
- Council had the opportunity to have various local food experts present to us throughout the year. We discussed barriers to the production, distribution and consumption of local food in the GTA/Golden Horseshoe, as well as the feasibility of establishing a local food / agri-product distribution mechanism in Niagara and Hamilton.
- Kathy MacPherson, Director of Research and Policy, Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation, attended a couple of Council meetings and arranged for some speakers of local food organizations in the Greenbelt to speak to Council. This included Martin Gooch, consultant, Value Chain Management Centre, and Mike Schreiner, formerly of Local Food Plus.
- Clay Switzer attended the Premier's Agri-food summit in April, 2009 on behalf of the Chair. He reported back to Council on the various technologies being showcased at the event. Council has sent a representative to this event for the past four years.
- In September Donna Lailey attended the "Greenbelt Think-tank" session, hosted by the Vineland Research and Innovation Centre (VRIC) on behalf of Council. The meeting was arranged to discuss various gaps and potential solutions for agriculture and sustainability in the Greenbelt and around the near urban centres in Ontario with a number of municipal and provincial representatives and stakeholders.
- In October 2009, Minister Watson arranged a meeting with the Honourable Leona Dombrowsky, Minister of Agriculture, Food & Rural Affairs so that Council could discuss their concerns regarding agriculture in the Greenbelt directly with her.

Greenbelt Council Liaison:

- In accordance with our Terms of Reference Council continued to strengthen its relationship with a number of Greenbelt related organizations through cross-appointments of its members.
- Donna Lailey continued to be a member of the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation Board of

Directors and keeps Council apprised of their work.

- Debbe Crandall continues as the Executive Director of the Save the Oak Ridges Moraine (STORM) Coalition, and as the Chair of the Oak Ridges Moraine Foundation and she updates Council on the activities of these two organizations.
- Cecil Louis is one of the Co-Chairs of the Niagara Escarpment Commission (NEC) and provides updates to Council on the work of the NEC.
- Erin Shapero is one of the Co-Chairs of the Municipal Leaders for the Greenbelt and she has provided updates to Council on the activities of this voluntary group of municipal mayors and councillors. Erin is also on the Board of Directors of the Oak Ridges Moraine Foundation.

Changes in Greenbelt Council Membership:

- Howie Herrema retired from Council in June of this year. Howie's views on Greenbelt land use issues and agriculture in particular were invaluable and he will be missed.
- In June, 2009, the Greenbelt Council Chair Dr. Robert Elgie was reappointed by Minister Watson for another year. Virginia Maclaren, John Middleton, Clay Switzer, and Bachir Hosn have all been re-appointed for one-year terms.
- Council was pleased to welcome one new member this year. In July, 2009, Minister Watson appointed Dennis Yellowlees, a sheep farmer in the Greenbelt, for a two-year term.

Minister Watson attending Council meetings

- Council was very pleased that Minister Watson has been able to drop by to several of our meetings this year. We do understand that the Minister has a very busy schedule and we appreciate his making the time to meet with us. Council appreciates the Minister's and his staff's commitment to the Greenbelt and their willingness to listen.

Greenbelt Council Website:

- The Greenbelt Council web pages have been regularly updated to reflect new appointments including the biographies of all members, the minutes from Greenbelt Council meetings, and all letters of advice provided to the Minister as well as the respective responses.

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December 18, 2009

Dr. Robert Elgie
Chair
Greenbelt Council
777 Bay Street
16th Floor
Toronto, ON M5G 2E5

Dear Dr. Elgie:

Thank you for your letter of November 30, 2009 in which you provide me with the Greenbelt Council's year end report for 2009.

I am pleased that Council has had such a productive and interesting year. Many of the items you discussed and provided advice on are key matters that affect the implementation of the Greenbelt. These include the grape and wine industry, property tax assessment for on-farm facilities, the Green Energy Act, archaeological attractions in the Greenbelt, and the Environmental Assessments for the Niagara and GTA West Transportation Corridors.

I always appreciate meeting with Council whenever possible to hear your discussions first hand. As you know, I asked the Honourable Leona Dombrowsky to meet with Council in October so that she could hear your concerns directly about agriculture and the Greenbelt.

I am also pleased that you and other members have agreed to continue with your appointments to Council. It is invaluable to have a foundation of awareness and knowledge of Greenbelt issues that comes from the continuity provided by existing members, combined with the perspective of new appointees like Dennis Yellowlees.

Your contribution to the Greenbelt plan performance monitoring framework through ongoing input and direction, particularly from Virginia Maclaren, and by participating in the Ministry's consultation sessions, helped us in moving this project forward.

Council has also continued to foster your working relations with our partner ministries and with other individuals and Greenbelt organizations such as the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation. I appreciate that Council has continued to keep itself informed by inviting such a variety of speakers to your meetings. I encourage you to maintain and strengthen these relationships.

In closing I would like to thank Council again, on behalf of myself and my staff, for all of their hard work and commitment over this past year in supporting the integrity of the Greenbelt. 2009 has been an exceptional year for the Council and I look forward to working with you and Council members in 2010.

Sincerely yours,



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Minister

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