

Greenbelt Council

Conseil de la ceinture de verdure

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February 11, 2020

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

Re: Water governance—making the connections

Dear Minister Clark,

It is my pleasure to send you the Greenbelt Council's eleventh progress report as we proceed through our 2019/20 work program.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "David Crombie". The signature is fluid and cursive.

David Crombie
Chair, Greenbelt Council

Copies to:

Kate Manson-Smith, Deputy Minister

Greenbelt Council members

Ed McDonnell, CEO, Greenbelt Foundation

Rob de Loe, Professor, University of Waterloo, School of Environment, Resources and Sustainability

Mike Walters, CAO, Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority
Greater Golden Horseshoe stakeholders

**Greenbelt Council for the Greater Golden Horseshoe
Report #11 (January 2020)**

Continuing its practice of distributing progress reports after its meetings, the Greenbelt Council is pleased to share its eleventh report. It communicates Council's work in considering matters of public interest with respect to Ontario's Greenbelt and the implementation of *A Place to Grow: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe*. The Greenbelt Council is mandated by the Province of Ontario to provide advice to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

At its meeting January 29, 2020, Council engaged the following experts: Rob de Loe (Professor, University of Waterloo, School of Environment, Resources and Sustainability) who spoke about water governance and Mike Walters (CAO, Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority) who talked about the Lake Simcoe Protection Plan and its implementation. Council also heard from Greenbelt Council Member Kevin Eby who presented a demographic assessment of housing trends and needs using Waterloo Region as an example.

The text below summarizes the discussions that informed the following recommendations of Council.

To improve water governance, Council recommends—

- 1. The Province address water governance issues with a responsive accountability framework that includes effective inter-ministerial coordination. Public policy needs to focus on understanding and making critical connections among related systems if it is to achieve societal goals with respect to ecology, economy and community.*
- 2. The Province ensure that the upcoming Conservation Authority Act regulations provide the flexibility needed for conservation authorities to be effective in responding both to connections among related systems and to stressors—those we know about and those we haven't yet anticipated.*
- 3. Staff of the ministries of Municipal Affairs and Housing and the Environment, Conservation and Parks work together to finalize and release, as soon as possible, the Low-impact Development Guidance document to ensure that stormwater management issues are incorporated into Growth Plan implementation.*

Council heard that the water governance system is fragmented within itself and disconnected from critical related systems such as land use planning, economic development, social policy and health. Because of this we often fail to achieve the things we want such as clean, safe drinking water, reduced risk to life and property from natural hazards, healthy, productive ecosystems and economic prosperity. We heard that the solution lies, not in the creation of a super ministry of water, but in the making of critical connections among the ministries and

systems that affect each other, such as water governance and land use planning, and the subsequent design of legislation and policies to anchor those connections.

While, the province has made some connections—for example, through the *2019 A Place to Grow Plan*, which requires municipalities to undertake watershed planning, and the *Clean Water Act*, which requires official plans to respect approved Source Protection Plans—water governance continues to be disconnected from critical related systems. For example, land use planning that does not evaluate the potential for servicing (water and sewage). The need for public policy to focus on understanding and making these connections is critical if it is to achieve our societal goals with respect to ecology, economy and community.

Council also heard about the importance of designing flexibility and adaptability into the underlying water governance institutions if they are to be effective in responding to both the connections and stressors we know about and those we haven't yet anticipated.

With respect to the Lake Simcoe Protection Plan (LSPP) and its adaptive watershed approach, Council heard that having designated policies has helped to ensure protection of the watershed. It also heard that the monitoring programs are critical to decision-making and adaptive management. One cannot manage what is not measured.

The Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority (LSRCA) works closely with area landowners to meet the nutrient loading targets. This has included significant efforts to implement low-impact development that has proven to reduce runoff, loading and costs. Where loading cannot be decreased, offsetting programs in allow for flexibility in achieving the best outcomes.

LSRCA and other conservation authorities are applying low-impact development approaches despite the lack of guidance from the Province. Such approaches are critical to achieving improved water quality and quantity in built up areas. While Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks staff has been working on Low-impact Development Guidelines for many years, they have not yet been released.

As the guest speakers noted, conservation authorities are well positioned to facilitate essential water governance connections with their responsibilities for source protection, water and watershed management, and their relationships with municipal planning authorities and the development community. The provincial government would be well advised to tailor the upcoming *Conservation Authority Act* regulations to ensure that conservation authorities continue to have the flexibility needed to address water governance issues within a responsive accountability framework.

Housing-by-type versus Growth Plan target land needs assessments—the Waterloo Region experience

Kevin Eby presented a comparison of housing by type and density / intensification target based land needs assessments using Waterloo as an example. The research was prepared in cooperation with Waterloo Region. The data showed the impact of the aging boomer demographic on the single-detached housing market over time. This analysis illustrates the importance of continuing to forecast the need for land based on the density / intensification targets rather than simply extrapolating the past into the future as is done in a housing-by-type forecast. The context within which new housing construction is occurring is undergoing a relatively rapid change brought on by the large number of retiring baby boomers and the implications of such research should be further explored.