

Region of Niagara PIC Webinars Q & A Session Feedback - June 2021

The current housing affordability crisis is largely a result of the price surge due to the COVID-19 pandemic is the result of years of neglecting to provide builders with serviceable lands and by restricting density in neighbourhoods with zoning that has effectively frozen the number and size of existing buildings. This tightening of the land supply prevented the supply of available housing that has created an unprecedented frenzy for home buyers seeking their dream of home ownership.

The precedent has been set for lands that have been included in the Ontario Greenbelt to later be removed by the Kathleen Wynne government in 2016. These lands were originally included in the **urban boundaries** set by the municipalities and then subsequently removed.

Examples are as follows:

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Hamilton councillors remove Stoney Creek lands from Greenbelt

STONEY CREEK NEWS SEP 20, 2016

Hamilton councillors approved a request from Stoney Creek's representatives to remove a portion of land at Barton Street and Fifty Road East in Winona from the Greenbelt.

"It should be there," said Ward 10 councillor Maria Pearson. "It's a dust field next to the (St. Gabriel) school."

Pearson said the 10 acres is already serviced land. Both councillors said the property is surrounded by development, with little chance of it being farmed.

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Hamilton planning staff stated these lands were **already in the city's urban boundary and "therefore these removals represent technical changes only."**

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Greenbelt legislation, established in 2005, is undergoing its first 10-year review. On Thursday, city councillors voted to add more than 100 new hectares of land to the greenbelt. But they also voted to remove a large section of tender fruit land in lower Stoney Creek, and 28 hectares of farmland in Waterdown.

Grimsby Mayor still in talks about Greenbelt

NEWS MAR 22, 2017 BY ALEXANDRA HECK GRIMSBY LINCOLN NEWS

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GRIMSBY — Mayor Bob Bentley just isn't giving up, and now he's finally getting a meeting with the province to talk about the Greenbelt review.

The Grimsby mayor, who expressed dismay at the freezing on Greenbelt lands around the town when the report came out in January, has spent months following up with the province.

After numerous calls, emails and research, he says he's found "the bottleneck" in the system.

He will soon be meeting with the Ministry of Agriculture.

"Frontline people are being told not to make any changes," said Bentley, who doesn't believe that Grimsby's report on Greenbelt lands was considered by provincial staff.

"The people in the middle didn't even get to see our report."

Bentley says that he has also asked for assistance from Sam Oosterhoff, the MPP for Niagara West, who was prepared to arrange a meeting between Bentley and the Conservative party Agricultural critic.

"If they don't even take the time to read it, it's doing a disservice to everybody," said Bentley. "We know for sure that people who need to see the report haven't seen it."

During the Greenbelt review, the town of Grimsby offered to trade land into the Greenbelt for other places that they say are ripe for development. The town is particularly concerned with developing lands around the proposed site of the GO train station.

The Greenbelt committee took the land that the town offered, but did not open up any spaces for development. (!)

"We're one of the few municipalities that have offered to trade," said Bentley. "That provision has been in the legislation since 2005."

The mayor expects to meet with the ministry in coming weeks.

The GTA Greenbelt is more than a decade old. Can everyone calm down about it already?

By John Michael McGrath - Published on Jan 20, 2017

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Whoever's in charge, the actual small-scale disputes people are having over the Greenbelt's future (as opposed to the fictitious, existential ones) are often legitimate judgment calls and not simple ransacking of green space. Grimsby, for example, has maintained for much of the last decade that the Greenbelt was drawn through the municipality without regard to local conditions. In particular, **the town put water and sewer infrastructure in the ground years before the Greenbelt was implemented on land that now can't be developed**. Amusingly, some of that land, in the town's west, would be close to the planned Casablanca GO rail station the Liberals announced earlier this year — building there would both support other government plans and follow sound planning principles.

The province's development policies call for dense, transit-oriented development. But given how GO builds train stations, what's currently on offer in Grimsby is a train station commuters have no choice but to drive to, surrounded by acres and acres of parking — not an obvious win, as far as the Greenbelt is concerned. Niagara Region has offered to add land to the Greenbelt if some of the land near Grimsby can be freed up, but the announcement last week means no deal from this government.

The point isn't to plead Grimsby's case, but to say these are reasonable debates about the Greenbelt's shape, not arguments over its very existence. There are still good reasons to keep an eye out, and groups such as Environmental Defence do good work as watchdogs, most recently pushing the government to pause and reconsider the GTA West highway. But the Greenbelt is a status quo policy now. That doesn't mean there won't be arguments over its future — we've had public health care for a lot longer than the Greenbelt, and we certainly still argue over that — but that it's not a life-and-death struggle anymore.

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The collateral damage of Ontario's greenbelt

Fraser Institute – as Appeared in the Waterloo Region Record and Guelph Mercury

But today there's a growing belief that if left uncontrolled, Canada's expanding cities risk occupying too much space. One of the main voices of this line of thought belongs to Toronto's chief planner who advocates growth boundaries, such as Ontario's Greenbelt, to restrict urban expansion. According to this theory, greenbelts will help rein in runaway infrastructure costs and preserve natural heritage by forcing denser urban growth. However, data suggests they inevitably do more harm than good, depriving farmers of land value, and driving up home prices.

Farm owners inside Ontario's Greenbelt are amongst its greatest collateral victims. Farmland accounts for just over two-thirds of an Ontario farm's assets. Much of this value comes from the possibility of one day developing farmland into homes, a value that can be wiped away by urban growth boundaries. A study of the Greenbelt's effect on farmland estimates farms near Toronto and inside the Greenbelt's protected countryside lost an average of about 24 per cent of their property value when the law came into force. For Ontario farmers, many of whom are rapidly approaching their career's end at an average age just under 55, this loss of land equity can make retirement even less attainable.

But farmers are not the only ones hurt by the Greenbelt; it also threatens housing affordability as Toronto grows. The region is expected to accommodate an additional four million inhabitants by 2031, and land restrictions will inevitably cause rising prices as the city bumps up against its legislated boundary.

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Other Notes:

The following items must be addressed sooner rather than later, they cannot be prolonged further in long term planning because as time passes the costs greatly increase.

1. The LAE (Livingston Avenue Extension) lies within what is defined in the Regional Official Plan Amendment 13 (ROPA13) as a **Major Transit Station Area**: *“This includes the lands within an existing or planned higher order transit station or stop within a settlement area; or the area including and around a major bus depot in an urban core. Major transit station areas generally are defined as the area within an approximate 500 to 800 metre radius of a transit station, representing about a 10-minute walk.”* Building the extension is a critical component to provide access to the Grimsby GO Station (and parking) whether it is via pedestrian, bicycle or vehicle means. This amendment has been mandated by the provincial government to meet the projected population growth that must be included in the Niagara Region Official Plan. This is the reason why the LAE must be completed. We fully support a target to remove the west end of Grimsby (along the LAE) out of the Ontario Greenbelt – especially for lands that have been identified in the Region of Niagara Official Plan in ROPA 13 as a Major Transit Station Area. The many small and irregular parcels of property along the LAE in the west end of Grimsby cannot sustain good fruit or grape production – these lands have been fallow for decades. The Town of Grimsby hired consultants **AgPlan Limited** which provided the following CONCLUSIONS/OPINIONS in their report from on **October 28, 2016**: *“The findings of this study demonstrate that the lands proposed to be removed from the specialty crop area in Grimsby are relatively poor for the production of specialty crops. Several of the tests for the designation of a specialty crop area are not met: - specialty crop production is not predominant, - soil capability and soil potential in Grimsby is not the best found in Niagara and in some areas is diminished due to non-agricultural development, - fewer farms and farmers are producing fruits and vegetables within Grimsby and, as a result, there is diminishing infrastructure as well as fewer farmers skilled in the production of fruits and vegetables Given the characteristics of the lands in Grimsby proposed to be removed from the specialty crop area (areas identified within this report as one and two and located north of the Niagara Escarpment), I am of the opinion that the lands can reasonably be removed from that specialty crop area designation.”* The full report from AgPlan that provides scientific proof the lands is not specialty crop is available from either the Town of Grimsby, Region of Niagara or from the brothers Trifunovic upon request.

2. The LAE will provide a much-needed access route to the Grimsby GO Train station and will make the station a more viable option for a greater number of commuters. The extension will be a vital component to ensure an efficient and safe commute for residents to the station. The Region of Niagara has selected the option to complete the LAE as their preferred choice and we fully support this decision.

3. Completion of the LAE will be a critical transportation component to meet the conditions for the “Five Year Review of the Regional Policy Plan – New Regional Official Plan” to properly meet the population/transportation growth plans in the Niagara Region which is expected to double by 2041. Most specifically the Town of Grimsby which will be a gateway to GTHA, Niagara and the USA, there is a desperate shortage of shovel ready land in the urban boundary. In Bill 108 the New Growth Plan makes changes to the Density Targets for 2017 where the Niagara Region must achieve a minimum density target of 50 residents and jobs combined per hectare in designated green field areas. Some lower tier

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municipalities (the current Grimsby council) are not on track to meet growth requirements as they continue to fight developments.

4. During the rush hour or at times when there are closures on the QEW or its service roads and/or Main St West, the LAE will provide an alternate route to reduce the traffic logjams that we see today. This will allow tourists from GTHA and USA easy access through-and-to Grimsby and the Niagara Region to promote and build our tourism business.

5. As it stands today many times the QEW is a traffic quagmire to be avoided – the introduction of the Grimsby GO Station and easy access to it via Casablanca Blvd and the LAE is a vital component to the success for moving people. The fear of being in a stand-still traffic jam will be greatly reduced. Also, this will allow first response vehicles to have options to quickly and safely respond to emergencies.

6. The LAE will ease traffic gridlock on the QEW, its service roads and Main Street West - which will reduce vehicles and heavy trucks in bumper-to-bumper stand-still mode emitting carbon emissions.

7. The LAE will provide an alternative route to protect the heritage buildings on Main Street West (Hwy #8) in Grimsby. Completion of the Livingston extension will eliminate the need to widen and/or add bike lanes and sidewalks to Main St West (Hwy #8) across Grimsby from Christie St and Oakes Rd to provide a viable thoroughfare. The completion for the LAE will allow heritage properties found along this stretch of road (on Hwy #8) to be saved; completion of the LAE already includes provision for bike lanes and sidewalks to safely and effectively move traffic across town and to the GO Train Station.

8. Will provide first response emergency service vehicles with a complete east-west access route through the town to the hospital.

9. Will provide alternate routes for school buses to safely transport children to local schools, rather than taking Main Street West (Hwy #8) or a QEW service road across Grimsby.

10. Will be necessary to provide for future population growth expected in the Niagara Region: “Source: National Post (6 months ago) GO Train Expansion fueling Niagara housing boom. Metrolinx began its GO Train service to the Niagara Region in January, and it has already seen relative success and plans for continued expansion. Some of Metrolinx plans include more frequent trips to the region and a new station to be built in Grimsby. They project that Niagara’s population of 500,000 will more than double by 2041 and have made gradual steps to unite the region to Canada’s largest market in the GTA.”

11. Utilities including water, sewers, natural gas and Bell Canada communication lines are already in place along the LAE but are largely not used because the extension has not been completed – the completed infrastructure must be utilized! Roadway infrastructure is the most important of all public assets; it is too valuable to let it go to waste considering it has already been paid for.

12. Building the LAE will provide the required framework for reducing traffic gridlock and will provide a foundation for the infrastructure required for the new Grimsby GO Train Station and the new businesses and residences that will inevitably move into the GO Train transit hub area. It is unfortunate that the decades-old taxpayer investment into the sidewalks, water mains, Bell lines and sanitary services already implemented in this west Grimsby area have been left unused.

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13. In the Executive Summary of the Metrolinx GO Rail Station Access Plan dated December 12, 2016 the following Vision Statement is laid out, the completion of the LAE falls directly within the vision – The Metrolinx Vision statement: *“GO Transit rail station access will be planned and delivered in an integrated, sustainable, and financially efficient manner to grow ridership, enhance all customers’ experience and safety, and reduce the dependency on single-occupant vehicles. Access improvements for all modes will be planned, delivered, and managed in collaboration with key local and provincial partners to support transportation and land use objectives for increasing the economic competitiveness of the GTHA, improving the quality of life of local communities, and contributing to the region’s environmental sustainability. Access improvements will be targeted to maximize returns on investment, support a shift to transit and active transportation, promote the development of more walkable, higher density communities surrounding GO rail stations, and implement Provincial policy objectives.”*

14. With an influx of business to the Town of Grimsby there will be an increase in local businesses and job opportunities to provide better wages for local residents and an increase in tax revenues. This will benefit local residents and provide the opportunity to provide mixed-use housing that will be affordable to residents in the town. The GO Train Station and the completion of LAE is a key element for Grimsby and the Niagara Region to effectively meet growth needs.

15. Most local side streets between Ontario Street and Casablanca Blvd already feed onto Livingston Ave. Thus, Livingston Ave is the main throughway for the Grimsby east-west business corridor. The extension of Livingston Ave will improve this transportation network. Without the extension the Livingston Avenue meets a **DEAD-END** exactly at the Grimsby GO Train Station and traffic flow to/from west Grimsby is shuttered. Completion of the extension is imperative to eliminate traffic bottlenecks already clearly evident.

16. The LAE feeds directly into the improvements scheduled to be made to Casablanca Blvd to improve traffic flow, especially for the planned Grimsby GO train station. We fully support the improvements to the Casablanca Blvd in support of providing ease of accessibility to the GO Train station.

17. More housing and employment lands must be developed to allow businesses to flourish locally. Restrictive land use policies and limitation of urban boundary expansion by lower tier municipalities prevent the needed growth. When employment lands are forced outside of Grimsby it increases the traffic gridlock of people commuting to neighboring communities. People want to work where they live and this is being prevented.

18. The Grimsby GO Train Station along with the LAE will make a crucial contribution to economic development, growth as well as important social benefits to Grimsby that the current council seems to ignore. This will provide access to employment, health care and education lands to the community. It will provide expansion of the road network for development that is crucial in providing affordable housing. The extension will open up more areas and stimulate economic and social development.

19. Properties along the approximate 1.5 km stretch of the LAE between Casablanca Blvd and Oakes Rd North are physically divided into two parcels. The north portion of these lands would be **land-locked** along the CN rail line i.e., if the extension were not to be used as a roadway; this is of great concern to the landowners! The proper solution would be for the Niagara Region to build the LAE. It is a fair and

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reasonable request to complete the extension since it has been planned by the region since 1972, i.e. this has been in the works for **48+** years – it is now time to complete this project!

20. Property owners that border the LAE are in favour for its completion (including the owners of the woodlot); they are in favour for building this road.

21. The following is some background information taken from a Town of Grimsby Planning Department memo dated November 3, 2014. This excerpt can be found in the Planning and Development Committee meeting agenda background info noted below - why should this investment be thrown away?:

- *“Regional Road 512 (Livingston Ave) presently terminates approximately 200m west of Casablanca Blvd. The Town of Grimsby completed a Transportation Planning Study in 1995 which identified the extension of Livingston Ave between Casablanca Blvd and Oakes Road as part of the roadway improvement plan. “*

- *“A further Traffic Operations Review/Geometric Review study was completed by Niagara Region in 2011 which identified the need to extend Regional Road 512 (Livingston Ave) from Regional Road 10 (Casablanca Blvd) to Oakes Road. “*

- *“The Livingston Ave right of way was obtained in 1972, it is believed by the DHO (Department of Highways Ontario) part of a Transfer of Highway #8 to Regional Government (assumption expropriated). A sanitary sewer was installed through the area between Casablanca Blvd and Hunter Road in 1979 to service the Elmer/Geddes Street Subdivision on Hunter Road. This necessitated the clearing of a 10 metre corridor through the woodlot to the east of Hunter through the unopened road allowance from Hunter to Casablanca Blvd. The subdivision was registered as Plan 403 “Forest Park” in 1956.”*

- *“A watermain was installed to the west between Hunter Road and Oakes Road in 1983.” - “The Value of the Sewer is in the range of \$1 million. The value of the Watermain is in the range of \$¾ million. “*

- *“Both the Water main and sewer line are in use. The sewer serves the residential development in the vicinity of Hunter Road/Geddes. The town conducts active ongoing maintenance of the services, and as part of the maintenance program needs to maintain a 5m wide corridor free of trees. This necessitates removal of some of the post 1970s “bush” regrowth that has occurred since the services were installed.”*

22. Push-back against progressive developments such as completion of the LAE in the Town of Grimsby (by the current council), is not in keeping with the future growth obligations that have been outlined by the province for the Niagara Region. The push-back is discriminatory conduct against the many that are less fortunate and cannot afford to rent or buy homes in the Niagara Region any longer.

23. The LAE in Grimsby is property of the Region of Niagara and their decision - based on scientific findings in their Environmental Assessment – is to proceed with its completion. The region should not be negatively influenced by lower-tier municipalities and agencies that have NIMBY agenda's that suppress growth and have been noted in the Ontario Human Rights commission as follows:

“NIMBY opposition to affordable housing development was a major human rights issue raised by consultees, including both tenant advocates and housing providers. People should not have to ask permission from anyone, including prospective neighbours, before moving in just because of stereotypes

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relating to grounds under the Ontario Human Rights Code (Code). Concerns about affordable housing projects should be legitimately anchored in planning issues rather than stereotypical assumptions about the people who will be housed. The Commission heard that discriminatory NIMBY opposition delays or discourages affordable housing development, increases its costs and diverts public funds to costly appeals to the Ontario Municipal Board, when these funds could instead be used to create more affordable and supportive housing. It may cause housing providers to feel they need to make compromises to get affordable housing built, even when these compromises undermine the dignity or well-being of their residents. For example, the Commission heard that housing providers may be asked to install windows that cannot be opened by tenants, or that are frosted so that tenants cannot look at their neighbours. In some cases, people are exposed to harassment throughout the planning process, and end up feeling unwelcome once they move into their new neighbourhood for reasons relating to grounds listed in the Code. NIMBY opposition to affordable housing projects can violate the Code when it results in changes to existing planning processes, barriers to access to housing or exposes proposed residents to discriminatory comment or conduct. For example, claims of discrimination could arise if a municipality requires additional public meetings or amendments to the planning process solely because the intended residents of a proposed housing project are people with addictions, youth or older people, lone parents, in receipt of social assistance, or people with disabilities including mental illnesses. When planning policies or practices are directed towards, or disproportionately affect, people because of Code grounds, they may be seen to violate the Code. The barriers created by NIMBY opposition cannot be overcome by any one stakeholder in isolation. The committed involvement of housing providers, municipalities and other levels of government is necessary to eliminate these kinds of barriers to creating new and affordable housing. The Commission is calling for development of a provincial strategy to address and prevent discriminatory NIMBY opposition to affordable housing development.”

NIMBY lower tier municipal politicians are:

- using the Conservation Authority to carry out its core conservation mission by appointing crony citizens (sometimes without the proper vetting process) to the board
- spending tax payer dollars to fund programs and studies that suppress growth
- ignore and target those who opposed their agenda It appears the vision of the Ontario Auditor General has come to fruition - *"In a special report she released on NPCA operations last year, Ontario Auditor General Bonnie Lysyk raised concerns that a board dominated by municipal politicians may lead to conflicts of interests when it comes to a Conservation Authority carrying out its core conservation mission."*

24. The build for the LAE will alleviate traffic on the South Service Road and Casablanca interchange. Also, this will alleviate traffic demands that will be imposed on the Hwy #8 heritage properties.

25. The LAE will provide critical direct access to the Grimsby GO Train Station parking lot and will also provide direct transport for residents and tourists to the downtown merchants. The current Town of Grimsby council biased agenda does not support this critical need.

26. The current attitude (which is very strong for many residents in the Niagara Region) is every adult in the household must have their own car, and will never use the GO Train to commute to the place of

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employment. The reality is the GO Train will be used by tourists to visit and bring business to the Niagara Region, will invigorate residents to commute to work, e.g. to Hamilton Health Sciences (HHS) hospitals - the largest employer of persons in Hamilton - this includes the Grimsby Hospital that is part of the HHS family.

27. Each municipality in the Niagara Region must implement a comprehensive plan for local public transit to change the mindset of local residents and encourage them to reduce dependence on commuting by automobile.

28. The 1.5 km LAE has been identified and planned as a requirement since 1972. It is time to complete this long-term project; it will be a critical arterial roadway.

29. We fully support the build for the Grimsby GO Train station at Casablanca Blvd. It is difficult to understand the unreasonable rationale behind the recorded vote at the May 21, 2019 Town of Grimsby Council meeting where 2 councillors were against resolution '*C-19-171 Resolved that the Council of the Town of Grimsby supports the establishment of a GO Train Station in Grimsby at Casablanca Boulevard*'.

30. The Region of Niagara planning process for projects (e.g., for LAE) is overly long and needs to be expedited to meet future growth needs. There must be decisive language and action to meet the mandated timelines and targets. Energizing the private sector is one of the provincial government's key priorities, however lower tiered governments are throwing up roadblocks and resistance that needs to be addressed.

31. The Region of Niagara must provide timeline certainty for projects with online metrics for business, residential and transportation needs. This will provide city planners and builders with a streamlined approach to allow required growth to be faster and cheaper as well as to comply with the regulations that do need to be met.

32. The Region of Niagara Official plan must make it a priority to reduce red tape to restore its competitive advantage. When red tape is eliminated it translates to dollars saved and jobs created, and will ensure planned development projects will be faster and cheaper. When lower tier town council ignore transparency and cost efficiency and build road blocks it results in unsatisfied and disenfranchised parties and failed development opportunities. The economic impact of these barriers cannot to be understated. The bureaucracy created from special interest funding and studies (such as for heritage) results in increased taxes and costs. Business opportunities will simply flee to other regions that have more transparency and progressive business focused policies.

33. The Region of Niagara Official plan must include incentive programs for builders and planners to ease the dire housing crisis. **There does not need to be large taxpayer assistance for this to be realized; only an easier path for building transportation and housing.** This needs immediate action to eliminate the bottlenecks and delays currently plaguing the building process.

34. There are large subdivision developments on the west-most border of Grimsby along Main Street West and again at Casablanca Blvd leading into the downtown. Completion of the LAE between these built up areas will provide a logical thoroughfare and required development lands to meet the needs of the defined **Major Transit Station Area** and the population growth expected in the Region of Niagara for 2041.

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35. Lower tier municipalities must have growth targeted to key development zones, e.g. **Major Transit Station Areas**. Intensification for population growth is the issue and where growth takes place is what needs to be assessed. It cannot be left to local town councils to make this happen, the province and upper tier governments must provide direction and enforcement to meet growth goals.

36. We fully support the Niagara Region's submission to the proposed changes to the PPS (Provincial Policy Statement) - (ERO #019-0279). *In particular under the ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION and PDS-31-2019 - Proposed Changes to the PPS to create Specialty Crop Area Guidelines: "The definition for "specialty crop area" – which remains unchanged in the draft PPS – mentions that areas are designated using guidelines developed by the Province. Niagara has a significant portion of land designated as specialty crop area. Presently, there are many instances in Niagara where lands are designated as specialty crop area where, in fact, those lands are unsuitable for any type of agriculture-related use. The Region requests the Province to create its referenced guideline and review existing specialty crop areas to accurately reflect existing uses through ground-truthed analysis." The Region of Niagara must submit changes to designated lands currently in the Ontario Greenbelt to allow for critical zones to be exchanged with lands outside the greenbelt to allow urban boundaries to expand where they are most needed.*

37. Lower tier municipalities are spending an increasing and unreasonable number of tax payer dollars for legal fees and various studies to fight housing growth at LPAT. Builders in turn are forced to spend an ever-growing number of dollars in legal fees to push growth. The combination of higher property taxes and per unit cost to actually build homes results in a housing affordability crisis that will only be exacerbated. It is for this reason a clear mandate to permit growth to meet population forecasts for affordable housing must be enacted.

38. The lands defined in the Ontario Greenbelt has resulted in builders leap-frogging into agricultural sensitive areas that are not as close to infrastructure like transportation corridors and serviceable lands with water and sewer availability. This results in an increase of costs to provide this groundwork which are passed on the home buyers.

39. Builders are forced to implement high-cost infrastructure with restriction to density which increases the per unit cost of the building. Farmers in greenbelt areas are the greatest collateral damage