

Environmental group has suggestions to improve Greenbelt

Environmental Defence has released a checklist of 13 critical actions for how the Ontario government can improve the draft Greenbelt and Growth Plans.

‘Ontario’s proposed amendments to the Greenbelt and Growth Plans are a good start, but don’t go far enough to protect and grow the Greenbelt or put an end to rampant sprawl,’ said Environmental Defence’s Greenbelt and Smart Growth Senior Program Manager Erin Shapero. ‘These 13 actions would fix the Plans to ensure a stronger Greenbelt that protects farmland and ecosystems, and encourage compact urban growth that is better for our economy and climate.’

The 13 items on the list are:

- Grow the greenbelt to protect vulnerable water supplies in the Greater Golden horseshoe;
- Protect sensitive headwaters south of the Greenbelt, including Humber River, Carruthers Creek, Rouge River and Don River;
- Freeze municipal urban boundaries;
- Extend Greenbelt protection to the natural heritage system across the Greater Golden Horseshoe and protect it in law;
- Cancel proposed changes that weaken protection for species at risk;
- Restrict linear infrastructure like highways and major transmission lines from fragmenting the greenbelt’s agricultural and natural systems;
- No expansion or construction of new 400 series highways in the greenbelt;
- Extend Greenbelt protection to the agricultural system of the Greater Golden Horseshoe and protect it in law;
- Require all municipalities to meet intensification and density targets for urban growth centres to 2041 without granting exceptions;
- Increase targets for mandatory intensification around transit hubs and corridors. link transit investment policy to the achievement of mandatory intensification in these areas;
- Require specific municipal climate change action, including metrics and timelines;
- Require transparent, yearly municipal reporting on climate change action milestones; and
- Establish a provincial body in legislation to oversee the implementation of the updated Greenbelt and growth Plans, including a clear process for monitoring and enforcement, public engagement and transparent reporting.

‘The development industry is putting enormous pressure on the Province to weaken the Growth Plan and remove farmland, forests and rivers from the Greenbelt’s protection,’ Shapero commented. ‘We urge the Province not to bow to this pressure and keep their promise to protect the Greenbelt forever. These proposed actions will protect vulnerable water supplies, support local agriculture and enable vibrant, mixed-use, public transit-supported communities that Ontarians want.’

Accompanying the checklist was a report card that evaluates the Province’s proposed amendments to the Greenbelt and Growth Plans. The report card gives them an overall grade of B-.