

Minor changes coming to the Greenbelt

Some minor boundary changes are in the works for the Provincial Greenbelt.

Municipal Affairs Minister Bill Mauro recently made the announcement, commenting the changes are based on a review of requests for boundary changes submitted since the creation of the Greenbelt, including during the almost-two-year consultation period for the Co-ordinated Land Use Planning Review. They are also based on a review of related technical information, as well as input from municipalities, conservation authorities and land owners.

None of the proposed changes impact Caledon lands.

Mauro reported the government received more than 700 site-specific requests related to the Greenbelt Plans. The Ministry reviewed requests that fell within the Greenbelt Plan Area and the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan Area.

He also said the government was guided by a number of considerations in the review, including avoiding boundary changes that would fragment farmland, including prime agricultural lands; maintaining a robust natural heritage system that can be supported despite urbanization occurring in proximity and downstream to the Greenbelt; respecting the functional connections in the natural heritage system; valuing the overall objectives of the Greenbelt as a landscape; avoiding a minimalist approach to defining the natural heritage system; and being responsive to landowner requests to evaluate site-specific situations.

Mauro said requests related to the Niagara Escarpment Plan were not considered because they were subject to a separate review process, led by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry.

The Minister said any boundary changes should be finalized early this year as part of the completion of the Co-ordinated Land Use Planning Review.

There has been some positive reaction to the announcement.

The Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation congratulated the Province on their commitment to protect farmland and nature with the announcement.

In a statement, the foundation said Mauro led a thoughtful, evidence-based review process and should be commended for his work in delivering this important achievement for Ontario.

They added the Province is reaffirming its commitment to protecting farmland from sprawl, and preserving natural heritage in the rural countryside. This decision ensures the protection of 161,000 jobs and \$9.1 billion in annual economic activity in the Greenbelt. During the review, thousands of residents shared their support for protecting and growing the Greenbelt through petitions, letters, and at public consultations. The Foundation believes the recent decision shows that their voices, as part of the 90 per cent of Ontarians who support the Greenbelt, were heard by their government.

The Foundation also praised the Province for standing firm in refusing to jeopardize the Greenbelt's integrity. Instead, only a small number of minor changes to boundaries will be permitted where there were legitimate technical grounds for such alterations. These adjustments of 58 hectares pale in comparison to the 9,000 hectares of land to be added to the Greenbelt.

"I am thrilled that the government did not remove thousands of acres from the Greenbelt and turn it into a Swiss cheese belt," said Burkhard Mausberg, CEO of the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation.

"We applaud the Ontario government for maintaining the Greenbelt's role to protect sensitive natural areas and slow down urban sprawl," commented Environmental Defence Executive Director Tim Gray. "We are happy to see that the proposed small boundary changes do not impact the overall integrity of the Greenbelt and mostly reject the over 700 requests to remove land from it."

"The proposed minor changes to align boundaries and remove 58 hectares from the Greenbelt do not impact its role in protecting natural heritage systems and farmland," he added. "Moreover, the expected addition of nearly 9,000 hectares to include sensitive water features, including urban river valleys, will increase the Greenbelt's reach and effectiveness."