**Peel sends letter to province expressing concern about removal of Greenbelt lands**]

**By Zachary Roman**

Peel Councillors are concerned with the provincial government removing land from the Greenbelt.

Ontario's Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing recently amended the Greenbelt Plan, Greenbelt area boundary regulation, and Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan. In doing this, it removed 3,000 hectares of Greenbelt land in 15 areas outside of Peel Region. At the same time, the Ministry added 3,800 hectares to the Greenbelt, also outside of Peel Region.

While the Ministry's move did not directly impact Peel, the Region's Councillors are still concerned about the precedent the move sets. At Regional Council's February 9 meeting, Council passed on consent a recommendation to send a letter to the Ministry ?communicating the importance of permanently protecting the Greenbelt.? Peel Councillors first instructed Region of Peel staff to write the letter at their January 12 meeting.

The Greenbelt was formally established in 2005 to protect water, natural areas, and agricultural lands. The Greenbelt Plan states that it ?identifies where urbanization should not occur in order to provide permanent protection to the agricultural land base and the ecological and

hydrological features, areas and functions occurring on this landscape.?

According to the province, the reason it changed the Greenbelt Plan was to accommodate growth and support the building of housing.

?The Province has indicated the lands would result in the construction of approximately 50,000 or more new homes with the expectation that planning approvals would be significantly advanced in 2023 and construction would begin by no later than 2025,? reads a Region of Peel staff report. ?The Province indicates that if these conditions are not met, the government will begin the process to return the properties back to the Greenbelt.?

According to a February 2022 report from the Ontario Housing Affordability Task Force, a shortage of land is not the root cause of Ontario's housing issues. The report states land is available in existing built-up areas and developed land outside of the Greenbelt.

As reported in The Narwhal, Victor Doyle, a former provincial planner who helped implement the Greenbelt, said many briefing notes were written that land swaps were not envisioned for the Greenbelt.

?The argument that you could take land out, particularly along the southern edge, and add it on the outer edge as they're proposing would mean in the fullness of time, the Greenbelt will migrate. It'll end up in northern Simcoe County if this pattern is continued,? said Doyle in a November 8, 2022 article written by Emma McIntosh.

In the Region of Peel's letter to Steve Clark, Ontario's Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Regional Chair Nando Iannicca said Peel has ?significant concern with the Province's recent decision to amend the Greenbelt Plan.?

Iannicca's letter says that removing previously protected lands undermines the integrity and permanence that was intended for the Greenbelt. He said the protected Greenbelt lands provide crucial ecosystem functions like reducing greenhouse gases and mitigating impacts of downstream flooding.

?Allowing for development in the Greenbelt encourages urban sprawl and inefficient development patterns. This type of growth is discouraged through the Province's own policies in the Planning Act, Provincial Policy Statement, Growth Plan and Greenbelt Plan,? said Iannicca. ?The Province has not provided evidence to support the conclusion that Greenbelt lands are required for housing development.?

While Iannicca noted Peel shares the province's commitment to increase housing supply and affordability, it does not approve of removal of lands from the protected Greenbelt area to reach that goal.

Iannica said Peel ?strongly recommends that the Province take a comprehensive approach to identifying the most appropriate lands for housing based on an integrated consideration of environmental, economic and social criteria and comprehensive analysis.?