

Province appoints Sterling as Chair of Greenbelt Council

By **ROB PAUL**

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The Ontario government has appointed Norm Sterling as Chair of the Greenbelt Council.

The former Minister of Environment, and founding member of the Niagara Escarpment Commission, will focus on helping the province as it undertakes what could result in the largest expansion of the Greenbelt since its creation in 2005.

"Mr. Sterling brings important experience to the Greenbelt Council, and I am confident that under his leadership there will be incredible work done to support growing the Greenbelt," said Steve Clark, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. "As a fellow grandparent, we understand the importance of leaving all of our grandchildren, and great grandchildren, with an enhanced version of the gem that is the Greater Golden Horseshoe."

Sterling replaces David Crombie, who stepped down as chair in December along with six other members of the Council to protest potential government rules that would negatively impact protection of the environment in Ontario.

The Greenbelt Council was created to provide advice to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing on land use matters related to the Greenbelt, including education and outreach to promote the goals of the Greenbelt Plan.

"It is an honour to serve as Chair of the Council as we work towards growing the Greenbelt," said Sterling. "I will leverage my experience to work collaboratively with our council to ensure that we are working toward protecting and growing the Greenbelt."

Sterling served as a PC MPP from 1977 to 2011, but voted against the creation of the Greenbelt in 2005.

"Ontario's Greenbelt protects farmland, communities, forests, wetlands and watersheds," said the Province in a statement. "It also preserves cultural heritage and supports recreation and tourism in Ontario's Greater Golden Horseshoe. The province is currently considering how best to protect and grow the Greenbelt through consultations on protecting the Paris Galt Moraine and adding, expanding and further protecting urban river valleys, and increasing the Greenbelt's footprint in urban areas."

The first round of public consultations on growing the Greenbelt concluded on April 19, 2021, and the input is being reviewed. Further engagement and consultation will continue through the summer.

The Credit Valley Conservation is based out of Mississauga and hope to see with Sterling elected Chair that the continued work of the Greenbelt council remains on preserving and protecting the land.

"The Greenbelt Council plays an important role in land use planning matters," said Credit Valley Conservation. "It is our hope that the Council continues to champion the natural and cultural heritage value of the Greenbelt for a thriving environment and healthy communities in Southern Ontario."

Though the appointment of Sterling has seen some praise, Hamilton West-Ancaster-Dundas NDP MPP Sandy Shaw criticized the Premier for appointing Sterling despite his past protest of the Greenbelt.

Environmental groups worry if his appointment was influenced by Ford wanting to pave over the Greenbelt and wonder whether or not Sterling understands the importance of protecting the environment.

"Given the quality of the people who resigned and the scores of people who might have filled this role in a creative manner, it

appears that the province has chosen an insider who may help manage risks rather than someone who might embrace the needs expressed in our April 19 submission that the Greenbelt needs to be expanded," said Ontario Headwaters Institute Executive Director Andrew McCammon.

The submission from Ontario Headwaters Institute detailed how much the Greenbelt means to the province and why it must be protected at all costs.

"The Greenbelt extends beyond these significant landforms to protect natural heritage systems, water systems and agricultural systems within the Greater Toronto Hamilton Area. A Place to Grow: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (Growth Plan) directs urbanization to settlement areas and designated greenfield areas, to support managed growth throughout the Greater Golden Horseshoe," said McCammon. "Together, the Greenbelt and Growth Plan provide a framework to support population and employment growth while protecting natural assets essential for sustainable prosperity. The Greenbelt protects valuable ecosystem services including clean water, contributes to the \$49B provincial agriculture and agri-food sector, supports nature and biodiversity, and encourages complete communities."

With the current boundaries of the Greenbelt, not enough prime and important land is being protected and Sterling needs to change that, according to Ontario Headwaters Institute.

"Currently, however, the Greenbelt covers only 21 per cent of the lands in the Greater Golden Horseshoe. Growing the Greenbelt throughout the region will add resilience to the broader local ecosystem while helping to safeguard its ecological integrity, social vitality, and economic prosperity. While Ontario has a proud history of wise land-use planning and world-class leadership in watershed management, recent reductions in environmental protection are creating uncertainty and skepticism."

Ontario Headwaters Institute urges the province to grow the Greenbelt in six key areas: the Paris-Galt Moraine; urban river valleys; natural heritage system across the Greater Golden Horseshoe; agricultural system in the Greater Golden Horseshoe; lands and waters in the Bluebelt; key headwater areas.

McCammon is adamant that these recommendations are needed now and looks forward to Sterling proving he's done his homework on the Greenbelt.