

Residents campaigning for Greenbelt protection in Bolton this weekend

By **Zachary Roman**

A group of Caledon residents are meeting this weekend to spread awareness about protecting the Greenbelt.

Dan O'Reilly and Betty de Groot are organizing a 'Save the Greenbelt' leaflet handout in Bolton this Saturday. Anyone interested in participating is asked to meet at the gazebo in Downtown Bolton at 10 a.m. on Saturday, May 11.

O'Reilly is collaborating with a group called The Greenbelt Promise for the handout.

The Greenbelt Promise is a group dedicated to protecting the Greenbelt, specifically by calling out Ontario Premier Doug Ford's 2018 promise when he said 'we won't touch the Greenbelt.'

On December 8, 2022, the Ford Conservatives voted for legislation that removed protections from parts of the Greenbelt. This opened up 7,400 acres of the Greenbelt for development and added 9,400 acres to it elsewhere.

Protecting the Greenbelt for future generations is a priority for de Groot, and she said she doesn't want to see any of it touched.

Through the Greenbelt Promise campaign, O'Reilly and de Groot hope to get people emailing, phoning, or visiting Dufferin-Caledon MPP Sylvia Jones to ask her to restore protection of the Greenbelt.

According to the province, the reason it changed the Greenbelt Plan was to accommodate growth and support the building of housing. However, a February 2022 report from the Ontario Housing Affordability Task Force said a shortage of land isn't the reason for Ontario's housing issues. The report states land is available in existing developed land outside of the Greenbelt.

At Region of Peel Council's February 9 meeting, Council sent a letter to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing 'communicating the importance of permanently protecting the Greenbelt.'

In the Region's letter, Regional Council Chair Nando Iannicca said Peel has 'significant concern with the Province's recent decision to amend the Greenbelt Plan.' Iannicca's letter said that removing previously protected lands undermines the integrity and permanence that was intended for the Greenbelt.

Mike Balkwill of the Greenbelt Promise group said many people were shocked when Premier Ford broke his promise to not touch the Greenbelt. He said he attended many protests about it where he met people attending a protest for the first time in their life.

'More sprawl is the exact opposite direction of what we need to be doing,' said Balkwill. 'The Greenbelt promise was the real revealing moment about the Ford government's agenda.'

Balkwill said it's important to know the Greenbelt land can still be saved before it gets developed and that's why it is so important to fight back right now.

'It's really important for the public to know that this is not a done deal,' said Balkwill. 'Their actions, and their speaking up, makes a difference.'