



A Report to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing

Golden Horseshoe Greenbelt Consultations

May-June 2004

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Introduction

Whereas the Ontario Trails Council was a participant in the process of consultation on the proposed Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing “Toward a Golden Horseshoe Greenbelt” in May and June 2004, the OTC is pleased to offer its viewpoints on this initiative.

The Ontario Trails Council is a non-profit organization formed initially in 1973, the OTC was reformed In 1989 and is now a 180 member organization representing 440 clubs, 500,000 club members, and quite possibly 5 million trail users of municipal park trails, public parks, conservation authorities and provincial organizations in Ontario that support recreational trails.

Our mission and purpose:

“To promote the creation, development, use and conservation of Ontario’s 64,000 plus kilometers of recreational trails.”

In this role we comment on broader issues, we study trail development, land use, trail design and best practices to ensure trail safety and limited liability for trail managers. We also compare trail practices to ensure that best practices are shared. We also advocate for legislation that supports the trail infrastructure.

Context for Comment

In this lead role the OTC is concerned about the issues of encroachment and density, user conflict and potential expansion of trail activity in an area designated as a Greenbelt in the Golden Horseshoe. The 640,000 square kilometer greenbelt area proposed by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, contains the largest number of trail users in the country.

Therefore the actions of the Ministry and its recommendations on land use are of great importance to the members of the Ontario Trails Council. The OTC also understands the pressures on land use throughout the province, and has drafted general policy on land use for municipal planners, trail managers and members to consider when developing trails.

OTC Policy Statement on Land Use - June 2004:

In response to the ongoing issues of land use the OTC has drafted specific guidelines on land use. Whereas the OTC is a non-profit organization promoting the development, access and use of recreational trails it finds it necessary to refine its position on the use of land for recreational purposes.

Distinctions

There is public and private land. Some of the public land is controlled by the authority of regional governments and municipalities. This is sometimes transferred to public access through parks or conservation authority. Other public land is controlled by the Ministry of Natural Resources, usually crown lands and forests. Most crown land is in northern Ontario.

There are a variety of users of these lands. They may be motorized or non-motorized. They may have machines or animals or children. They may be operating a form of recreational craft, such as a bike or a canoe. There is an interaction between users on the various types of land.

There may be a fee for use. Usually there is a fee attached to the use of land. Usually this is in the form of a permit attached to the machine if the person is a motorized user. In the case of non-motorized, an event fee for participation or staging of an event using land. In addition municipal or regional authorities, and most certainly **Ontario Parks**, parks charge fees for admission and/or parking.

Problems:

There is limited access. Due to a variety of pressures there is less land in southern Ontario for recreational purposes. These are environmental, population, conservation, dedicated or other reasons.

Population encroachment and related developments limits the availability of land for recreational use. Environmental concerns remove protected areas from the potential land base. Conservation to protect watershed and river areas limits other use. Dedicated land for future development or other zoning removes additional acreage for recreational use.

In addition the ability of private and public landowners to obtain and maintain necessary insurance coverage in order to permit public use, through agreement or otherwise is limiting access to recreational trail users.

Resolutions –

In order to ensure the broadest public interest be attained in the availability of lands for recreational use, the OTC proposes:

- 1) Public planners include in public land use plans, corridors for recreational trails.
- 2) Trail users expect and respect land use, and shared use, by other trail users.
- 3) That private property rights be respected at all times.
- 4) Event planners ensure that their permits, obligations and use guidelines for events are properly processed and followed by all participants.
- 5) Provincial lands are set aside for recreational use.
- 6) Provincial insurance for recreational trails be developed and implemented.
- 7) Those municipalities, departments of the environment and crown land stewards work with recreational trail users to ensure sustainability of land resources for recreational trail users.
- 8) Trail users return the land after events to the condition of the land prior to the event.
- 9) Environmental and conservationist organizations work with OTC and its members to strike a balance between competing demands on land.
- 10) Province wide safety and policing issues be addressed so that there is a public and private accountability regarding trail use.

Comments on Greenbelt Processes

The Greenbelt Consultation asked for comment on 8 distinct areas. This included Environment, Economic Development, Agriculture, Transportation and Infrastructure, Natural Resources, Culture Recreation and Tourism, Administration,

During discussions it was apparent the issue of trails would be discussed in greater detail in the Recreation, Culture and Tourism section. However there is distinct comment areas in each of the other sections discussed was the OTC made comment during small group discussion.

1. Environment - The OTC put forward that conservation, not preservation outcomes should be applied to the lands affected by the proposed Greenbelt. We think this significant as conservation speaks to managed use and stewardship, whereas moratoria on lands speak to inventory and possible removal from use.

Conservation for the OTC also implies a directive towards innovative practice that would see new land use applications, wetland processing enhancements, and planned managed access to these areas. This also allows for public education and appreciation of the environment through use.

The OTC expects that sensitive lands be respected by all trail users. *This means that trail development should occur in a manner that sees the Greenbelt allow for trail use, in conjunction with safe responsible land stewardship, as is currently demonstrated by conservation authorities and conservation areas.*

2. Economic Development - The OTC recognizes that trails provide direct economic impact to the Ontario economy. In presentation to pre-budget consultations in 2003 we estimated the value of trail activity as a \$2 billion dollar input to the GDP.

We suggest that the Greenbelt area offers distinct economic opportunity. *We encourage emphasis on innovative or inventive practices that see "Greenbelt" business that promote the aims of the area to be supported and encouraged by all governments, which includes trails related activity.*

Further we suggest that a series of land tax incentives and other pricing mechanisms be adjusted to act as a stimulus for managed “Greenbelt” business activity. During the discussions there was much debate about the balance between economic development and the implementation of a Greenbelt.

We suggest that there be a strong correlation and organization between the outcomes desired in the Ministry of Public Infrastructure (PIR) Growth Management Plan and the Greenbelt Plan. It is apparent to the OTC that currently there is no clear coordination of effort between the two plans. Given the area encompassed by the Greenbelt is the engine of the Canadian economy we think that an action plan detailing the connection points of the Greenbelt and the Managed Growth Initiative are vital to determining actual outcomes.

We remain unsure as to the prime goal in this area, is it all out GDP economic growth, managed growth, growth of a particular type or no growth.

3. Agriculture – During consultations the OTC had its first significant opportunity to discuss land use with farmers. It is apparent that agriculture in the Greenbelt is economically problematic. Supply nodes are geographically located at cost ineffective points, and production costs exceed product market value (other than vineyards) makes agriculture an unviable industry in the Greenbelt.

The decision has to be made: is agriculture in the Greenbelt to be made a viable economy, or is it a mechanism that keeps lands in private hands as a future inventory for Greenbelt use? When they come on-line are they absorbed at market rate, is there equity compensation, or just straight appropriation?

Escalating development puts pressure on existing lands, escalating tax costs, and poor production yields and revenues are driving farmers off the land. Land speculation only fuels this cycle. The OTC welcomed the suggestion of an Agriculture sub-committee examining agriculture in more detail.

We do not want to see leap-frog speculation and development outside the Greenbelt area as this may result in less overall land in agriculture in the long run, and put increased pressure on existing trail systems in those currently rural areas.

The OTC encourages the recognition of private landowners and private lands and advocate that lands used for trails in conjunction with private landowners, especially those used for agriculture are respected. We would expect this same respect on trails in Greenbelt areas that are on or near farmlands.

4. Transportation and Infrastructure – The major emphasis for the OTC is that this section offered the most opportunity to recognize trails as a major transportation infrastructure and a major alternative transportation system(s).

We suggest that funds be provided through Greenbelt development to ensure that new and greener transportation systems be built. We also recommend that existing trails infrastructure be enhanced to allow for greater volume of use, and at a minimum, the capital costs of maintaining existing infrastructure be provided.

We recommend that alternative systems of light rapid transit, cycling routes, mass urban transit, rail, and hiking trails in support of local transportation, be investigated as functional alternatives to existing high pollution, high density, and automobile dependent methods.

5. Natural Resources - One weakness is that this section focused too strongly on aggregate extraction. As in the environment and conservation area of discussion the OTC is interested in the establishment of minimal environmental impacts while maintaining access to the natural environment.

The OTC supports additional efforts to ensure that lands used for the extraction of natural resources are restored or improved upon during a process of reclamation. We would encourage supported trail development in these areas, as currently exists along the Bruce Trail, which has a strong history of aggregate land ownership and balanced trail access and use.

We would encourage infrastructure support of existing conservation lands that have trails, as these pockets of natural spaces form the backbone of the Greenbelt.

6. Culture, Recreation and Tourism – There should be closer coordination of the goals of economic development, transportation infrastructure and development of culture, recreation and tourism in the Greenbelt. Tourism, Culture and recreation are dynamic economic systems that rely upon the movement of persons to the areas of attraction or use.

These must be contained in the final plan on the Greenbelt. Access to and from the major metropolitan centre of the country must be balanced with land conservation such that future recreational needs can be met. Over restriction on access will directly negatively impact tourism and cultural use.

Existing recreational lands use must be conserved, with the supporting infrastructure capitalized such that it can be maintained and developed to accommodate emerging use patterns. We expect that a Greenbelt will attract persons to it for the purposes of recreation, as recreation is, for most users a green activity – i.e. it takes place in the natural as opposed to man-made environment.

We suggest that recreational activity is directly correlated to land use, and subsequently has a direct relationship to land use planning. Therefore we encourage the support of existing land conservation planning policies, and the development of new processes that promote the development and use of recreational trails in the proposed Greenbelt area.

7. Administration and Implementation – The Greenbelt consultation process did not clearly define administrative responsibility. Municipal and local control was put forward by some groups as the best methodology.

As most trails are local, and defined by community based organizations the OTC supports a provincial policy document that allows for clear planning guidelines, implemented by local authorities in conjunction with local trail needs.

However the OTC recognizes that those trail systems that bridge communities, traverse long distances or are defined by some other overarching provincial trails implementation plan (i.e. Hydro Corridors) related to tourism, heritage, unique natural function, or user group should be considered outside of the Greenbelt Plan. These may require regional or provincial consideration and the final Greenbelt Plan must define these planning inter-relationships.

We welcome the suggestions and acknowledgement of the Greenbelt Consultation Plan that a separate 'trails strategy' be applied and then meshed into and with the Greenbelt lands.