



Possibility grows here.

How Ontario can Support the Greenbelt

Research consistently shows that over 9 in 10 Ontarians support the Greenbelt, across the political, demographic, and geographic spectrum. This document is for candidates and parties who want to know how to ensure that the Greenbelt is supported in the upcoming Provincial election and beyond.

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Photo by: David Coulson

Why the Greenbelt is Important to all Ontarians

Climate change, global food supply chain disruptions, population growth, and the biodiversity crisis make the Greenbelt more important than ever. We need specific actions to ensure the Greenbelt continues to be a unique asset for Ontario now and into the future.

We are asking all provincial parties and candidates to support a number of commitments that will ensure the Greenbelt remains permanent, protected, and prosperous.

With your support, the Greenbelt's over two million acres of protected farmland, forests, wetlands, and rivers, can continue to provide clean air, fresh water, and a secure local food source to all Ontarians



Commitments to ensure the Greenbelt remains permanent, protected, and prosperous:

- 1. Invest in local food, agriculture, and agri-business to build local resilience and sustain the regional economy, including rural jobs**
- 2. Invest in the restoration of Greenbelt natural systems and connectivity**
- 3. Expand and increase equitable access to public greenspaces across the region**
- 4. Reduce the impact of linear infrastructure and resource extraction**
- 5. Protect and expand the existing Greenbelt boundaries**

See below for further details and actions supporting these commitments.

Regional Planning

The Greenbelt Plan was introduced in 2005 to shape the future of this region and built on the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan and Niagara Escarpment Plan. It is the cornerstone of the Growth Plan, which provides overarching strategy and clarity and certainty about urban structure, where and how future growth should be accommodated and what must be protected for current and future generations. One of the essential functions of the Greenbelt is providing the certainty about where development should not occur in order to support smart growth. The Greenbelt's permanent boundary also provides certainty for farmers and others, enabling ongoing investments in agricultural and sustainable tourism operations.

Take Action to Ensure Security of Local Food and Agriculture

The importance of Ontario's local food to food system security has never been greater as global conflicts, inflation, and climate change disrupt food supply chains, such as the recent droughts in California and floods in British Columbia. The Golden Horseshoe is the second largest food hub in North America and the Greenbelt is a vital asset in the region. Local food is at the heart of Ontario's agri-food industry as 60 per cent of food produced here is consumed in Ontario.

As an agricultural working landscape, Ontario's Greenbelt protects 750,000 acres of some of Canada's most fertile farmland including specialty crop areas in the Niagara Peninsula Tender Fruit and Grape Area and the Holland Marsh - commonly known as Ontario's "vegetable basket". Greenbelt farms play an important role in Ontario's food security, accounting for over 50 per cent of Ontario's fruit acreage and over 2,800 acres of vegetable production.

Greenbelt farms are close to the manufacturing facilities and distribution networks that serve Canada's largest retail markets and ready access to the U.S. Our research has identified opportunities for increased local production to replace imported goods. This presents significant economic

Ontario's Greenbelt is home to thousands of working farms that support much-needed jobs and the economy. Many within 100 kilometres of major urban centres and Canada's largest consumer market.

growth potential while building long-term food system security. A number of existing barriers need to be addressed to take advantage of this opportunity.

Greenbelt farmers, like farmers across Ontario, face numerous challenges such as increasing demands from government, retailers and consumers, urban encroachment, labour shortages, climate change, soil degradation, succession planning and volatile international supply chains. These increasing demands must be balanced with investment in economic opportunities for farming and local food production. Canada's governments invest far less on agri-environmental programs than competing jurisdictions like the U.S and E.U. Incentives, information, and education will result in better outcomes, greater resilience, and enhanced competitiveness for Ontario's agricultural sector. Implementing "Canada's Next Agricultural Policy Framework" is a key opportunity that should be supported.

To support rural jobs, Ontario's economy, and a secure Ontario food system, candidates should:

Support and call for a Local Food Strategy to increase local food supply and public sector procurement as well as incentives.

Ensure federal and provincial funding for agriculture through 'Canada's Next Agricultural Policy Framework' includes more support to improve soil health and attracts many more farmers to adopt beneficial management practices to build climate resiliency.

Protect the regional agricultural system from further fragmentation. Successful planning for agriculture includes consideration of the broader agri-food industry, including the production, processing, and distribution of agricultural goods and services.

Reject municipal planning decisions that would reduce protections in Greenbelt agricultural, headwater and natural heritage areas — such as re-designating land to other purposes.

Commit to completing the provincial evaluation process to identify and designate new Specialty Crop Areas. This designation is intended to protect important fruit and vegetable production lands clustered in and around the Greenbelt, help keep these lands in production, and discourage purchase for non-farm purposes.

Protect our Natural Environment so it can Protect Us

Faced with biodiversity and climate crises, governments around the world are making bold commitments to protect nature, conserve biodiversity, and help communities adapt to climate change.

Greenbelt natural systems like forests, wetlands, and healthy soils, help to prevent flooding, protect our freshwater, and keep our communities cooler during extreme heat events.

The Greenbelt is at the centre of one of the most biodiverse regions in Canada and a critical migratory route for wildlife. It protects key core habitat areas for species at risk that

The Greenbelt's natural areas and water systems provide essential climate resilience for local communities in the Greater Golden Horseshoe—Canada's most rapidly urbanizing region.

are linked through a series of natural corridors. These core areas and natural corridors are under pressure from climate change, linear infrastructure, resources extraction and landscape fragmentation. Restoration and enhancement projects are needed to maintain the services provided by the Greenbelt's natural infrastructure.

By permanently protecting Greenbelt natural systems, we can save on infrastructure costs, improve our region's resilience to climate change, and support biodiversity.

To support restoration of Greenbelt natural systems and connectivity candidates should:

Support a call for a restoration fund or provincial natural infrastructure program that will deliver core municipal services and community co-benefits to increase climate resilience. Programming should also support planning and knowledge transfer among municipal practitioners to develop projects, accelerate, and scale up.

Support development of stronger policies to protect ecological connectivity within the Greenbelt and to broader environmental landscapes in southern Ontario.

Support local stewardship programs with objectives that support connected and restored landscapes and improve property and agricultural incentives.

Improve Access to Greenspaces for All

Access to nature is not equal. Our research with Green Infrastructure Ontario shows that two million people in the Golden Horseshoe are currently living in neighbourhoods with low accessibility to parks and distribution within the region is not equal.

30% of Visible Minority and Low-Income neighbourhoods and 55% of neighbourhoods with high ratios of Indigenous populations have low access to large parkland.

It finds that the number of new parks planned across the

The pandemic further highlighted the critical importance of access to nature and greenspace for people in near-urban areas. Increased usage from residents during and since the pandemic shows us how important it is to protect and invest in it.

region is not keeping up with population growth. A regional coordinating body is needed to ensure that parkland is grown equitably in the future.

Nearly 70% of Ontarians live in or near the Greenbelt. They are served by regional tourism and recreational assets such as the Greenbelt Route for cycling, the Credit Valley Trail, the Bruce Trail, and the Oak Ridges Moraine Trail. There is great potential for restoration and the expansion of Greenbelt public trail systems and green spaces, which would help millions of Ontarians get out into nature.

To ensure the continued viability and integrity of the Greenbelt, candidates and parties should:

Commit to increasing the accessibility and number of public greenspaces across the region. As the population grows, it will be important to maintain the current per capita rate of large parkland to people. A total of 35,602 ha is required to be created over the next 30 years or a rate of 1,180 new ha created per year.

Support investment in existing greenspace in the Greenbelt and across Ontario and seek out opportunities like the Oak Ridges Moraine Trail to preserve and enhance capacity.

Reduce the Impact of Linear Infrastructure and Resource Extraction

The Greater Golden Horseshoe is a rapidly growing region, and it is understood that improvements to linear infrastructure will be required to meet the needs of the growing population. However, these activities can significantly impact agricultural, natural heritage and water resource systems.

A systems approach to evaluating cumulative impacts is necessary to understand the full extent of negative impacts. Given the unprecedented challenges of climate change

Agricultural, natural heritage, and water resource systems in the Greenbelt are crucial to the long-term sustainability of the region. Greenbelt policies should be strengthened to ensure their long-term integrity.

on these systems, their vulnerability, and the continued impact of development, the application of the precautionary principle should be applied to linear infrastructure and resource extraction in the Greenbelt.

Stricter conditions and standards should apply to these type of activities in the Greenbelt.

Reducing the impact of linear infrastructure and resource extraction in the Greenbelt will require:

Ensuring decisions about new linear infrastructure in the Greenbelt take into account the broader impact on critical natural systems and ensure further fragmentation of these sensitive systems is not permitted.

Ensure Agricultural Impact Assessments are completed for new infrastructure projects in the Greenbelt.

Infrastructure projects transecting the Greenbelt Plan Area continue to require comprehensive Environmental Assessments.

Transit stations, including related road access and parking space, should be restricted to settlement areas, within walking distance for commuters, rather than in the Greenbelt protected countryside.

Ensuring strict adherence to responsible industry standards for pits and quarries as a requirement for Greenbelt operations. Green aggregate standards should apply across Ontario and incentives should be provided for recycling.

Require more rapid rehabilitation of pits and quarries in the Greenbelt and provide funding or incentives.

Protect and Expand the Existing Greenbelt

Over designation of land supply undermines efficient use of existing infrastructure and is very costly to municipal finances.

Inefficient growth patterns – even outside the Greenbelt, can cause long-term pressures on the natural and agricultural systems of which the Greenbelt is a part. These systems are important.

Many regions continue to designate more land for development despite thousands of hectares of existing, often serviced lands sitting unused across the Greater Golden Horseshoe region.

Housing affordability is a serious concern that can be addressed while minimizing urban boundary expansions. Focusing growth in existing rural and urban settlement areas helps to provide more efficient housing that makes better use of municipal infrastructure such as water services, roads, and public transit, rather than requiring costly new facilities.

To ensure the continued viability and integrity of the Greenbelt, candidates and parties should:

Maintain the current GB boundaries and reject requests for land swaps.

Seek opportunities to grow and strengthen the Greenbelt to address the needs and opportunities identified above.

Focus housing construction in existing settlement areas that have infrastructure to accommodate growth cost effectively and that do not further damage agricultural and natural systems.

CONCLUSION:

A Permanent Greenbelt for all Ontarians

Maintaining and growing a permanently protected Greenbelt should be a cross-party priority for the benefit of all Ontarians.

The Greenbelt must remain permanent and protected—for now, and for future generations. Permanently protected agricultural land and natural systems will become ever more important over time. The Province must show strong leadership to maintain and protect Ontario's asset and provide long-term certainty for Greenbelt communities, residents, farmers, and businesses.

GREENBELT BY THE NUMBERS:



\$9.6 billion in economic impact every year



177,700 full-time jobs



\$3.2 billion in ecosystem services



2 million acres of protected land



9 in 10 Ontarians support the Greenbelt



71 million tonnes of stored carbon



Home to 78 of over 200 provincially listed species at risk in Ontario



At least half of GGH residents visit the Greenbelt for nature recreation every year (* interpretation of survey results and doesn't include people who live in the GB)



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