



March 20, 2017

Dear MPP,

## **Re: Stand Firm on Greenbelt Protection and Growth Plan in Face of Building Industry Pressure**

The Ontario public overwhelmingly supports the Greenbelt and Growth Plan policies to build complete communities, curb inefficient sprawl development, protect vital water sources, and prime agricultural land. In fact, recent surveys show that 8 in 10 Ontarians support the Growth Plan, and almost 9 in 10 agree that the government should direct new growth to developed areas.<sup>1</sup>

However, a small group with financial interests in land development and speculation are leading misinformation campaigns against the public interest with the aim of watering down these popular and necessary policies.

The most recent attempt is through [www.stopsoaringprices.ca](http://www.stopsoaringprices.ca), an anonymous website that asks people to email their MPP to “rethink the proposed amendments [to the Growth Plan] that will further restrict supply”. The website misquotes several experts and elected officials in apparent support of the bogus claim that the Growth Plan restricts supply and pushes up house prices. The group behind the website appears to consist of a handful of developers who are known to build “palatial, luxury single detached homes” selling for upwards of \$2 million. An affordable house for most Ontarians is less than a fifth of this.

The claims made by those behind this anonymous campaign deserve scrutiny:

- Will the Growth Plan restrict supply? **No – the Growth Plan aims to increase the supply of mixed use and affordable housing in areas with transit, infrastructure and amenities.** In many areas of the GTA, the housing stock is almost entirely single family homes (e.g. 87% in York Region). Encouraging a wider range and mix of housing is a proven way to improve affordability and create communities where all Ontarians can live and work.
- Are we running out of land to build housing in the Greater Golden Horseshoe? **No - There are over 104,000 hectares of land, or an area larger than Toronto and Mississauga combined, designated for development.** The claim that land supply is the primary cause of housing price increases is simply incorrect. Research by the Neptis

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<sup>1</sup> 'Public Support for Ontario's Growth Plan Goals and Policies', Environics Research, January 2017. <http://bit.ly/2mDkIGg>

Foundation has repeatedly demonstrated that there is an ample supply of land approved for development in the Greater Golden Horseshoe.<sup>2</sup>

- Do experts think the solution to the housing crisis is to increase supply? **No – many experts say that supply is an insignificant factor in rising house prices.** A recent Ryerson City Building Institute policy paper found that high demand and speculation are driving prices up, despite housing construction keeping up with population growth.<sup>3</sup>

Rather than solving the housing crisis, further enabling inefficient low-density housing on prime farmland is likely to exacerbate many problems facing already Ontarians. It will lead to increasingly congested roads and highways, and necessitate multi-million dollar investments in new sewer/water pipes and infrastructure.

This anonymous group of developers is asking the government to erode the strong policies of the Greenbelt and Growth Plan. Their solution will only add to the fiscal burden faced by taxpayers and municipalities, and will destroy some of the best remaining prime agricultural land in Ontario.

As MPPs, you represent many Ontario families and young people who struggle with renting or owning a home. The affordability crisis is real, and we agree that actions should be taken. Numerous evidence-based solutions have been proposed by academics and organizations willing to stand behind their proposals, unlike the anonymous interests behind this website and others like it.

We encourage all MPPs to seriously consider policy solutions based on evidence and past experience, and ignore the self-interested proposals from a minority of vested interests. These would only succeed in making life harder for most hard-working Ontario families.

Sincerely,

#### **The Ontario Greenbelt Alliance Steering Committee**

- Erin Shapero and Tim Gray, Environmental Defence
- John Bacher, Preservation of Agricultural Lands Society
- Debbie Gordon, Save the Maskinonge
- Franz Hartman, Toronto Environmental Alliance
- Thaia Jones, Sierra Club, Ontario Chapter
- Lynda Lukasik, Environment Hamilton
- Kevin Thomason, Sunfish Lake Association
- Joshua Wise, Ontario Nature

#### **The Oak Ridges Moraine Partnership**

- Joyce Chau, EcoSpark
- Joshua Wise, Ontario Nature
- Debbe Crandall, Save the Oak Ridges Moraine (STORM) Coalition
- Amber Ellis, Earthroots

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<sup>2</sup> See for example, 'No shortage of land for homes in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area', Neptis Foundation, October 2016. <http://bit.ly/2gasurD>

<sup>3</sup> 'In High Demand: Addressing the demand factors behind Toronto's housing affordability problem', Ryerson City Building Institute, March 2017. <http://bit.ly/2miHSBd>