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Speaking Notes for Farmland Trust Forum

(Slide 1) Farmland Protection Symposium, Feb 17, 2012 10 Minute Presentation

(Slide 2) Clarington lies within the Greater Golden Horseshoe and is the eastern most Municipality of the GTA. It has the four urban areas: Bowmanville, Newcastle, Courtice and Orono.

When Europeans began to settle in Clarington (the late 1700's) they found a land abundant with dense forests. In 1792 Lieutenant Governor Simcoe established the original townships of (Slide 2a) Darlington and (Slide 2b) Clarke. Forestry was a major industry in the early 19th century; however, it soon gave way to agriculture.

Clarington's rural landscape is a product of the glacial age with the (Slide 2c) Oak Ridge's Moraine to the north and (Slide 2d) Lake Iroquois Beach through the middle. The glaciers deposited rich soils and aggregate deposits. Over the past two hundred years the rural landscape has evolved; man's intervention in the form of surveying and clearing the forest cover is the most visible change. The rural landscape is continually evolving; however, the pace and visibility is not as evident as that of the urban landscape. Thus the majority of the public have a false impression of stability and sustainability of the rural landscape. However, the changes are particularly evident to rural residents especially those involved in agriculture. countryside who see it as a productive working landscape.

In a few minutes I am going to focus on the area between (Slide 2e) Bowmanville and Newcastle as a microcosm of the competing interests in land uses.

(Slide 3) Land use Planning, my profession is all about trying to find “balance” between competing interests: environmental, economic, and social. The sweet spot is when you find harmony in the middle. That sweet spot will be beneficial to some individual property owners and not so for others.

The Province’s vision for land use planning in Ontario is set out in the Provincial Policy Statement. It seeks to focus growth within settlement areas. It promotes the conservation of natural heritage resources, water, agricultural lands, mineral resources, and cultural heritage. All resources are to be managed in a sustainable way to protect ecological processes, while minimizing impacts and meeting long-term needs. Inherently there is conflict; it is the role of the land-use planner to try and “balance” all of these competing priorities.

Planning legislation works from the top down not the ground up. In Clarington’s case we have Regional government Durham’s Official Plan and then our Official Plan. The local level of land use planning has to be in conformity with the higher levels.

(Slide 4) Farming is about the soil, the ground level, often farmers are working lands that have been in their families for a number of generations. In the area between Newcastle and Bowmanville, 50 years ago there were 16 farm families today there are 3. This is one of the issues, the majority of people and decision-makers no longer have a connection with the land. Often the people writing policy or the politicians approving policy have limited experience with farming or agriculture.

Much of our provincial planning policy is based on the 100 acre farm which today is a myth. Farmers have gone big, typically owning and/or renting more than 100 acres and have specialized into a specific commodity groups to compete. There are 100 acre subsistence farms out there or ones that are being subsidized by off-farm jobs individuals truly making a living from farming are very astute businesses. Highly successful farmers are incredible statisticians and researchers; they keep records on all of their various fields, crop yields, input costs and could rival any university professor for their research techniques and findings.

The agricultural attributes of these lands between Newcastle and Bowmanville are:

Best agricultural land in Ontario in 1999 Statistics Canada *“On a clear day, over one-third of Canada’s best agricultural land can be seen from the top of Toronto’s CN Tower.”*

(Slide 4a, b) While it is not specialty crop land it does have its own micro-climate which means it is one of the best apple producing areas in Ontario if not Canada.

(Slide 4c, d) There are specialty crops of blueberries and bird seed, and biofuel field crop are underway.

(Slide 4e) The agricultural production of field crops a leader in Ontario, having garnered the top yields for Zone 2 soybeans for the past 3 years .

The Provincial policies applicable to this area have some very interesting results.

The PPS allows planning authorities, which local municipalities are, to remove land from Prime agriculture areas for expansion of settlement areas (urban) if a number of tests can be addressed.

- 1) Has to be at the time of a comprehensive review of the Official Plan, every 5 years
- 2) Demonstrate other growth opportunities cannot accommodate needs (talk more about this in a minute) (Slide 4f-built boundary)

- 3) Infrastructure and public service facilities are planned/available things like
Transportation network, Water/sewer, Firehalls, recreation facilities, libraries
You can see that this is between two urban areas and a logical extension. (Slide 4g-
address points/density)
- 4)
 - a) not specialty crop area
 - b) reasonable alternatives to avoid expansion
 - c) no lower priority agricultural lands
- 5) Impacts on adjacent agricultural operations can be mitigated to the extent feasible

The combination of the (Slide 4h) Greenbelt and Places to Grow legislation has created some odd things. The two Acts create an area beyond the exterior of defined urban areas called the “whitebelt”. The Places to Grow legislation defined built boundary and dictates that municipalities must achieve 40% intensification within the built boundary and that all of the current designated urban lands have to be developed in advance of expanding urban boundaries to accommodate growth. The Places to Grow and Greenbelt Acts are the Province’s attempt to redefine and curb urban sprawl, forcing urban areas to become more densely populated and take on new housing forms other than the single family residential home on an individual lot.

The combination of the PPS and two Acts is a reprieve for these “whitebelt” areas. Essentially urban sprawl cannot extend into the whitebelt lands until an additional test for intensification has been satisfied. But a “reprieve” is not a change in direction it is just a lengthening of the timeframe. Given the existing policy framework the only way to protect these agricultural lands will depend on the approach taken at the Regional and local level.

In Clarington we already know it will be a battle to protect these lands for agriculture longterm. Locally we can keep them out of the urban area until at least 2031 and possibly longer; however by leaving them as whitebelt the Province indicated its longterm preference and the Region of Durham has identified their longer term intent in their Official Plan. These future intentions turn up the pressure. Already some lands have been purchased by real estate investors who are willing to hold lands for the longer term. Having ownership in the hands of the development industry means two things, the stewardship of the land is not the same as having it owned and operated by farmers, additionally there is constant pressure on local politicians to earmark these lands for future development.

(Slide 5) Since it is all about “balance”, the pressure on politicians has to be counter-acted by the agricultural community. They have to speak out for the land and its protection and they have passed a resolution that clearly sets the stage for this policy discussion at the local level. When the Committee brought forward this resolution the Mayor commented that it was great to have this perspective as it is not typically what he hears.

Clarington’s rural area houses approximately 18% of our population down from 22%, 10 years ago, therefore every agricultural representative has to be vocal and communicating the same message. The predominance of good soils, proximity to markets and growing season supports a prosperous agricultural industry.

Fortunately, our economic development office and the Clarington Board of Trade understand that the rural area is home of one of our top economic producers. In addition, Clarington Council recognizes this and to date have been very supportive of agriculture.

(Slide 6) Clarington in working with the Board of Trade and local community to ensure that value added items such as the apple packaging and processing plant for Algoma was located on agricultural land in the area between Newcastle and Bowmanville to continue to make the farming that is occurring in that area more viable.

(Slide 7) Regardless of our good intentions, it is difficult for a local municipality to implement protection measures without the concurrence of higher levels of government. Will these agricultural lands meet the same fate as many others and sprout a “final crop”? Not sure, but the likelihood of that not happening would have been better if they had been included in the Greenbelt Plan. And yes, Clarington could carry out the studies, hold the public meetings and try to have the lands included in the Greenbelt but the process set out by the Province requires concurrence of Durham Region, who have already stated their intentions.

The lands between Bowmanville and Newcastle are a microcosm of how some of the best agricultural land in Ontario is presumably protected and it is for the time-being. Without some tough choices by politicians, policy-makers and farmers protecting the best agricultural land is essentially on life support. But protecting it becomes even more critical if you consider the recent findings of the University of Guelph Farm Preservation Project found that only 11% of Canada’s land can support agricultural production.

How it will play out over the next 20 years will be very interesting for all of us.