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May 28, 2015

Richard Stromberg  
Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing  
Ontario Growth Secretariat  
777 Bay Street  
Toronto, Ontario M5G 2E5

Dear Mr. Stromberg,

**RE: Environmental Bill of Rights (EBR) Registry #012-3256  
Co-ordinated Review of the Growth Plan for Greater Golden Horseshoe, Greenbelt Plan,  
Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan and Niagara Escarpment Plan**

The Ontario Farmland Trust (OFT) commends the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing for leading the comprehensive review of the Growth Plan for Greater Golden Horseshoe, Greenbelt Plan, Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan and Niagara Escarpment Plan. MMAH's commitment to an open and public-facing policy review process is very appreciated, and in particular the significant effort that has been put into organizing regional town hall meetings and engaging diverse community stakeholders throughout the region. It is necessary to gather on-the-ground community perspectives on these four plans; this enables a holistic understanding of community concerns and policy implementation challenges, helps measure real success and impact of the plans, and informs improvements and future directions that support and protect long-term public interests.

Thank you for the opportunity to share the Ontario Farmland Trust's (OFT) observations, insights and recommendations on the review and refinement of the GGH Growth Plan, Greenbelt, ORMCP and NEP. OFT offers a unique perspective to land use planning policy development, as the only province-wide organization dedicated to supporting and advancing the permanent protection of Ontario's rich and irreplaceable agricultural land resources. Through charitable research, education and strategic land securement activities, OFT works collaboratively with farmers, government and community partners to protect and preserve Ontario farmlands and associated agricultural, natural and cultural features of the countryside for the benefit of current and future generations.

This policy submission is the result of more than a year of OFT's work liaising with partner farm and land conservation organizations, reviewing and engaging with relevant research, and hosting events like our annual Ontario Farmland Forum. Hearing from members and receiving specific feedback on the Growth Plan and Greenbelt Plan from Farmland Forum participants has grounded OFT's perspective and

recommendations; this includes a wide spectrum of individuals and groups interested in farmland preservation: farmers, private landowners, land conservationists, professional planners, researchers and elected officials. Equally diverse stakeholder representation and expertise can be found on our Board of Directors and Policy Committee, which have supported the preparation of this submission.

## **Ongoing Loss of Ontario Farmland is a Fundamental & Growing Concern**

OFT's primary concern is the ongoing, unsustainable and permanent loss of Ontario's agricultural land resources. 2.8 million acres of farmland have been lost to agriculture in the past 35 years, or 18% of Ontario's farmland base<sup>1</sup>. It is a disturbing trend that continues, despite the development of stronger provincial policies that are intended to safeguard and protect this land.

Productive farmland is a limited resource: only 5% of Ontario's landmass is capable of supporting agriculture, and of that, a much smaller portion contains our best growing soils, Class 1, 2 and 3 prime farmland, and the favourable climate to produce specialty crops. Southern Ontario and the GGH contains the best farming soils and climate in all of Canada, and is home to extensive farm infrastructure and established, invested farming communities. These factors make the agriculture and agri-food sector the #1 most stable, long-term driver of Ontario's economy.

Ontario's agriculture and agri-food sector contributes \$34 billion annually to GDP and supports 767,000 jobs<sup>2</sup>. The Greater Golden Horseshoe food and farming cluster is a big part of this, generating \$6.3 billion in annual economic activity<sup>3</sup>. Population growth and related development in the GGH and throughout Southern Ontario, however, is fueling staggering loss of Ontario farms and agricultural land year over year. From 2006-2011, even after the GGH Growth Plan and Greenbelt Plan were introduced, the loss of farmland increased to 350 acres per day across the Province, or 128,396 acres each year;<sup>4</sup> 161,287 acres were permanently lost urbanization in the GGH area over this five year period<sup>5</sup>.

## **More Leadership & Action is Needed to Protect Ontario's Farmland Resources**

More must be done to prevent the loss of Ontario's agricultural land and to permanently protect our farming communities. Farmland must be recognized in policy as a strategic, limited and non-renewable resource that receives the highest level of protection – once it is converted and developed for another use it is gone forever, with detrimental, long-term impacts on the economy, the environment, quality of life and community resiliency. As a core principle, OFT believes that all farmland in Ontario should be permanently protected for its 'highest and best use' for food, farming and agriculture, for the benefit of all Ontarians.

The Province must address the crisis of farmland loss in a bold and timely manner, working with the farm community to plan for a more sustainable future for the agricultural sector. Urbanization is the primary cause of permanent farmland loss in Ontario, and the Greater Golden Horseshoe region faces the largest scale and intensity of land development pressures. It is appropriate, therefore, that the Province developed the GGH Growth Plan to reign in urban sprawl across the region, and established

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<sup>1</sup> Statistics Canada, Census of Agriculture, 1976-2011

<sup>2</sup> Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food & Rural Affairs, 2015

<sup>3</sup> Golden Horseshoe Food & Farming Alliance, Agriculture and Agri-food Economic Profile for the Golden Horseshoe, Oct 2014

<sup>4</sup> Statistics Canada, 2011 Census of Agriculture

<sup>5</sup> Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation, Agriculture by the Numbers: Understanding the Greenbelt's Unique Advantages, Aug 2014

the Greenbelt, ORMCP and NEP to provide stronger protection for important agricultural lands and significant natural features and functions that are threatened by urbanization.

OFT supports provincial efforts to strengthen the protection of agricultural land through ongoing development and improvement of these Plans, other land use policy, and related processes, programming and support needed for policy implementation and communication of key provincial interests. The protection of Ontario farmland depends largely on effective and coordinated land use planning policy; it is good to see coordination of the review of the Greenbelt, ORMCP and NEP conservation plans alongside the Growth Plan, through MMAH. It is critical that the relationship between these plans is recognized and understood: urban growth management is an essential complement to land conservation. Proper land use planning for our urban areas is just as important as land use planning for the protection of agriculture, nature and our rural countryside. Growth planning directly impacts land conservation; emphasizing denser forms of development within existing settlement areas and maximizing use of existing infrastructure reduces urban sprawl and the loss of near-urban farmland and natural resources.

The GGH Growth Plan, Greenbelt Plan, ORMCP and NEP offer an important vision and framework for land conservation and community development in the region. It is critical that the Plans are maintained, and that MMAH, in collaboration with other provincial ministries, seeks to improve and strengthen these policy approaches, moving forward, to ensure full implementation, monitoring and enforcement that is necessary to achieve conservation planning and growth management objectives. While the GGH Growth Plan and Greenbelt set the bar higher and endeavour to improve the protections for Ontario agriculture, farmland in the GGH continues to be lost to other uses at an unsustainable rate. The four plan review is an opportunity for the Province to learn from the challenges and successes of the Plans to date, build on this important foundation for coordinated regional planning, and consider enhancements to the existing policy, and additional implementation tools and strategies, that will provide better protection for Ontario farmland.

### **Key Themes of the Ontario Farmland Trust's Recommendations**

OFT's comments and recommendations MMAH for the *Co-ordinated Review of the Growth Plan for Greater Golden Horseshoe, Greenbelt Plan, Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan and Niagara Escarpment Plan* are organized in the themes outlined on the next page, with emphasis on the Greenbelt Plan, Growth Plan and new implementation tools. Within each theme several recommendations are presented and discussed. OFT's submission is largely a response to Section 4.1 of MMAH's discussion document for the coordinated policy review: *Protecting Agricultural Land, Water and Natural Areas*. However, connections are made to other MMAH questions related to infrastructure, climate change and implementation of the Plans. All recommendations and commentary reflect OFT's farmland preservation expertise and the broader public and provincial interest in the protection of Ontario's unique and valuable agricultural lands.

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## **Recommendations for All Plans**

### **Creating Consistent Policy Language**

Update and harmonize definitions and policy direction across the four plans for permitted uses in prime agricultural areas, to be consistent with the 2014 Provincial Policy Statement language for agriculture, agriculture-related and on-farm diversified uses. This will provide more clarity and consistency to the interpretation and application of land use policy throughout the GGH and be more supportive of farm viability.

## **Recommendations on the Greenbelt Plan**

### **Maintaining the Greenbelt Vision**

Maintain the Greenbelt Plan mandate and vision to establish “a broad band of *permanently* protected land... which protects against the loss and fragmentation of the agricultural land base and supports agriculture as the predominant land use.”

### **Maintaining Existing Greenbelt Boundaries and Area**

Maintain the existing Greenbelt boundaries for public confidence in Greenbelt protections and the long-term effectiveness the Greenbelt policy. Any change to Greenbelt area that shifts boundaries in favour of urban development during this first review of the Greenbelt Plan will discredit and undermine the policy, bringing into question the Province’s commitment to permanent land protection and giving the impression that the Greenbelt is only a temporary land use policy that can be influenced by lobbying of development interests. The Greenbelt must stand the test of time as a strong, long-term permanent policy. To achieve this it is important to:

- Uphold existing policy language in the Greenbelt Plan:
  - “Amendments to the Plan shall not have the effect of reducing the total land area of the Greenbelt Plan” (section 5.7)
  - “Settlement areas outside the Greenbelt are not permitted to expand into the Greenbelt” (section 3.4.2)
- Develop a clear and rigorous process for review of any future proposals for settlement area expansion from towns and villages within the Greenbelt’s Protected Countryside. In the meantime, do not permit settlement area expansions.
- Prohibit ‘land swaps’ that would permit some lands to be removed from the Greenbelt in one area and new lands added in another area
- Introduce a ‘sunset’ provision for development approvals that pre-date the creation of the Greenbelt or ORMCP and have not yet broken ground. For example, require development to proceed within five years. If the deadline is not met then the development will be required to comply with Greenbelt policies.
- Require impact mitigation “offsets” for any greenfield development that occurs within the Greenbelt Protected Countryside and is associated with residential development, large-scale infrastructure projects (eg. the GTA West Transportation Corridor) and other urban-related uses. Given that these developments contradict the Greenbelt vision of a permanently protect agricultural land base, the development proponent should be required to “offset” their impact by funding the permanent protection of at least an equivalent acreage of farmland that is

disturbed. This can be achieved using conservation easements or farmland protection easements, in collaboration with land trusts or other conservation bodies. See the development offsetting section below.

- Recognize that the Niagara Escarpment and Oak Ridges Moraine policy boundaries are based on geological features that can't be moved. To protect these features, existing boundaries must be maintained.

### **Growing the Greenbelt**

Coordinate policy approaches and strategies for protecting farmland and managing urban growth across all of Southern Ontario. There is much prime farmland outside of the current Greenbelt area and many valuable agricultural communities outside of the GGH that also face urban growth challenges; these areas would benefit from greater protection in provincial policy. It would be helpful to have consistent policy protections for farmland across the Greater Golden Horseshoe and the Province to level the playing field for farmers and municipalities.

When considering expansion of the Greenbelt it is important to address GGH outer-ring areas under “leapfrog” development pressure, such as Greenbelt adjacent communities in Simcoe County, Brant County Waterloo Region, Wellington County and Niagara Region. If the Greenbelt boundaries are expanded, the potential for displacement of urban growth and leapfrog pressures into other communities on the periphery and beyond the GGH must be addressed. Communities within and outside the GGH need resources and support from the Province to adequately manage population growth pressures and preserve land resources.

Once favourable way to “grow the Greenbelt” would be to support and promote farmland protection easement agreements with farmers and property owners along the outer edges of the Greenbelt and other Greenbelt adjacent areas. This could be facilitated through the Farms Forever program being developed by the Ministry of Agriculture, Food & Rural Affairs or by scaling-up the Ontario Farmland Trust’s existing agricultural easement program. OFT has successfully developed and piloted agricultural easements in Ontario over the past ten years. Public and landowner interest in this new approach to land conservation is growing exponentially, with the majority of interested farmers being located in the GGH. Farmers are seeking ways to proactively protect their land but currently have few programs and supports available to them. Modest investment by the Province to build capacity for this work and provide resources and incentives for easements in targeted Greenbelt adjacent areas, would have a major impact on farmland preservation, farm viability and positive reception to growing the Greenbelt among GGH farmers (see more in the Other Implementation Tools section below).

Another approach to growing the Greenbelt would be to work collaboratively with farmers and municipalities in priority areas to develop Agricultural Growth Plans through the sub-area assessment process of the GGH Growth Plan. These Agricultural Growth Plans could identify strategic farm areas connected to and extending from the Greenbelt Agricultural System that would be focus areas for long-term provincial and community investment in the GGH food and farming sector. Agricultural growth planning efforts could be combined with strategic investment in a farmland protection easement program for greater impact. Read more below under Agricultural Growth Plans.

## **Supporting the Greenbelt Agricultural System**

Expand the concept of an “Agricultural System.” OFT supports language and ‘systems-thinking’ in the Greenbelt Plan that views agriculture as more than individual farms and farmlands (the backbone of the Agricultural System), and seeks to communicate and plan for maintaining broader connections within and across Greenbelt boundaries. This relates to landscape connectivity, essential farm community services and the unique water, energy, transportation, infrastructure needs of Greenbelt farms that contribute to a viable agricultural economy. Relative to planning for Greenbelt “Natural Systems,” however, the Agricultural System concept is underdeveloped and poorly understood among planners and policy makers.

The Greenbelt Plan states that “the Natural Heritage System is not a designation in and of itself with a list of permitted uses. Rather, it functions as an overlay on top of the prime agricultural and/or rural area designations contained in municipal official plans. As such, permitted uses are those set out within the prime agricultural area and rural area designations of municipal official plans, subject to constraints of the Natural System.” Further clarity is needed on how to understand and apply a similar Agricultural Systems overlay or planning ‘lens’ that complements official plan designations. Should Agricultural Systems be identified in mapping like Natural Heritage Systems? Communities need to know what elements of the Agricultural System they should be protecting, why this protection is needed and how to effectively achieve this.

Develop more guidance and resources for municipalities and planners that explain the dynamic elements of the agriculture system and the relationship between agriculture, prime agricultural areas and other systems (ie. Natural System) throughout the Greenbelt countryside. Help them develop better policy approaches that enable and support farm operations and sustainability of the agricultural community at large. This would create a better balance with the extensive planning and more in-depth resources provided for the Greenbelt Natural System and broader natural heritage systems in Ontario.

## **Balancing the Protection of Agricultural Land and Aggregate Resources**

Provide more balanced protection of prime farmland and mineral aggregate resources in the Greenbelt Plan, ORMCP and NEP. With respect to the Greenbelt, a substantial amount of detail is provided requiring aggregate operations to avoid and mitigate impacts to Greenbelt Natural Systems and Water Resources Systems, significant natural heritage features and hydrologic features, and connectivity of natural features, but very little requirements are in place to protect Agricultural Systems and features from negative impacts associated with aggregate extraction. There is no mention at all of impacts to Class 1-3 prime agricultural land or explicit expectations for avoiding impacts to prime farmland or rehabilitating disturbed farmlands. Agricultural land, like aggregate, is a finite, non-renewable resource in need of protection, wise use and careful management. OFT recommends that greater policy protection for farmland be achieved in three conservation plans, across the GGH and the Province through the following:

- Do not permit any aggregate extraction in Specialty Crop Areas
- Do not permit any aggregate extraction on Canada Land Inventory Class 1, 2 and 3 prime agricultural land. Alternatively, only permit aggregate extraction on Class 1-3 farmland *as an interim use* and require that the site be rehabilitated back to the same area, average soil quality and agricultural condition, as is consistent with the PPS
- Avoid aggregate extraction on Class 1-3 farmland by requiring site selection that prioritizes lands of lower agricultural capability (Classes 4-7), as per the PPS

- Prohibit aggregate extraction below the water table on Class 1-3 prime agricultural land, as rehabilitation of this prime farmland resource is not possible once the water table is exposed.
- Much like the requirements for aggregate extraction within the Greenbelt Natural System, require that any application for a new mineral aggregate operation, or the expansion of an existing mineral aggregate operation demonstrate:
  - How the connectivity of the Agricultural System will be maintained before, during and after extraction of mineral aggregates
  - How the operator will rehabilitate the site to a state of equal or greater agricultural value
- Require impact mitigation “offsets.” Aggregate extraction contradicts the Greenbelt vision of permanently protecting the farmland base from loss and fragmentation, typically resulting in the permanent loss of agricultural land resources. As part of impact mitigation on the agricultural community, aggregate operators should be required to ‘offset’ their impact by funding the permanent protection of at least an equivalent acreage of farmland that is disturbed as part of aggregate operations. This can be achieved using conservation easements or farmland protection easements, in collaboration with land trusts or other conservation bodies. See the development offsetting section below.

### **Regulating Commercial Fill Operations**

Prohibit large, industrial-scale commercial fill operations from dumping excess soil and fill materials onto farmland in the Greenbelt and all agricultural lands across the Greater Golden Horseshoe and throughout Ontario. Over the past ten years contaminated soil excavated for condo towers and cleanup of old industrial lands has been dumped onto dozens of sites within the Greenbelt. Commercial fill operations need to be a regulated land use and directed away from prime agricultural areas, groundwater recharge areas and sensitive natural features.

### **Supporting Agriculture and Farmland Protection in the Rouge National Urban Park**

Remove all references to the Rouge North Management Plan and a 600 metre ecological restoration corridor along the Little Rouge River (section 3.2.6). While we believe strongly in planning for the protection and enhancement of riparian lands and associated biodiversity, the prescriptive nature of the Rouge North Management Plan and 600 metre corridor within the Greenbelt Plan is inappropriate and contrary to the vision and goals of the Greenbelt to preserve farmland and support Ontario agriculture. It has created difficulties for local farmers, directing more than 1,700 acres of prime farmland to be removed from agriculture and planted in trees. This undermines farm livelihoods and misses a great opportunity to use public lands to enable farmers to produce the local food that nearby urban areas desire.

In the past several years farmers and conservation groups have come together to plan for the future of the Rouge North lands as part of the Rouge National Urban Park. It has been a collaborative and inspiring process involving all community stakeholders. The emerging park vision is more supportive of local food and farming and replaces the Rouge North Management Plan. The Greenbelt Plan needs to recognize the national park planning that is underway and show support for the results of recent community consultations and localized planning that strikes a better balance between ecological restoration and agriculture in this unique area.

## **Recommendations on the Growth Plan**

### **Maintaining Growth Plan Objectives**

Maintain and strengthen the Growth Plan vision, principles and action for coordinated regional urban growth planning and management that: directs growth to existing urban areas; optimizes infrastructure to support compact development and efficient land use; limits settlement area boundary expansions; and curbs urban sprawl to protect farmlands and natural areas.

### **Setting Higher, Binding Intensification & Density Requirements**

Set higher targets for intensification and greenfield density in the GGH that transcend the status quo. The Growth Plan sets minimum a target density of 50 residents and jobs per hectare for new greenfield developments, and an intensification target of 40% for residential development to be accommodated within existing built-up areas. Unfortunately, many municipalities have been granted exemptions from meeting the Growth Plan's intensification and density targets, while at the same time, there is indication that the minimum targets in the Growth Plan are too low to alter the status quo.

60% of outer ring municipalities have been given permission by the Province to maintain status quo low-density development with much lower intensification and greenfield density targets than those envisioned in the Growth Plan.<sup>6</sup> In the majority of cases these alternative targets are below the level needed to support basic transit service and result in urban sprawl that is contrary to Growth Plan objectives. It is not clear what factors the Province used to justify lowering minimum greenfield density targets for certain municipalities.

Intensification and density targets are also too low for inner ring municipalities who are following the targets prescribed in the Growth Plan. Research indicates that the levels of intensification and density prescribed by the Growth Plan were already being achieved in many of these communities before the Growth Plan was introduced, due to existing market conditions and development patterns.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, status quo development patterns continue in these areas where additional greenfield density and intensification could be easily accommodated.

Regional growth management in the GGH is also falling behind other jurisdictions like Metro Vancouver, which faces similar growth pressures. For comparison, from 2001-2011 Vancouver accommodated 69% of its new population within existing built-up areas designated for intensification, whereas only 20% of population growth in the Greater Toronto Area and Hamilton was directed to intensification areas.<sup>8</sup> In the GTA-Hamilton area, the remaining 80%, or 800,000 newcomers, were accommodated in new housing subdivisions at the urban edge with limited public transit options. This sprawling growth demanded immense infrastructure development and investment over this ten year period, while at the same time many established urban areas in the GTA with existing infrastructure actually lost population.

Overall, the composition of the housing stock and development patterns in the GGH do not seem to have changed significantly as a result of the Growth Plan. New residential development in the GGH largely continues to be single detached houses in sprawling subdivisions, despite the Growth Plan and

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<sup>6</sup> Neptis Foundation, Implementing the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, 2013

<sup>7</sup> Neptis Foundation, Understanding the Fundamentals of the Growth Plan, Mar 2015

<sup>8</sup> Neptis Foundation, Growing Pains: Understanding the New Reality of Population and Dwelling Patterns in the Toronto and Vancouver Regions, May 2015

the need for a diverse housing stock consisting of townhouses, semis, and midrises that are more affordable and supported by transit.

In both the inner and outer ring, the majority of municipalities are treating the minimum density and intensification targets of the Growth Plan as the maximum, rather than exceeding the targets as encouraged by the Plan. This is resulting in unnecessary and permanent conversion of agricultural lands to urban use in a way that wastes valuable land resources with inefficient forms of low-density development.

The above trends were not those envisioned or promoted at the outset of the Growth Plan. Growth Plan targets need to set the bar higher, not reinforce the status quo or enable lower standards. Higher urban intensification and density targets can be achieved by implementing the following:

- Increase intensification targets to 50% or more, with emphasis on inner-ring municipalities. This is more in line with the progressive growth management approaches taken by other large cities in North America like Vancouver. A 50% intensification target would eliminate the need for any urban boundary expansion until after 2041.<sup>9</sup>
- Eliminate exemptions that have been granted to outer-ring municipalities and require them to come into compliance with the intended minimum standards for intensification and greenfield development density that are outlined the Growth Plan
- Strengthen section 2.2.7.2. to require that municipalities actually meet and achieve their greenfield density targets *annually*, rather than just *planning* for targets that do not have to be enforced. The Province needs to support municipalities like Waterloo Region that seeks to achieve higher intensification and density targets. Waterloo Region’s official plan policies are currently being undermined by the Ontario Municipal Board and the development lobby who argue that Growth Plan targets do not have to be achieved. As a result the Waterloo’s urban boundary may be forced to expand to include more than 2,600 acres of low-density sprawl, rather than the 210 acre expansion desired by the community – a dramatically different future.
- Introduce meaningful penalties/consequences for municipalities that fail to meet intensification and density targets or seek to prematurely expand their urban growth boundaries (eg. loss of greenfield growth privileges/options). Settlement area expansions should only be considered or permitted after a municipality has demonstrated that they have achieved base intensification and density targets.
- Provide incentives and support to municipalities and the development community that will better enable them to meet intensification and density targets (see more below).

### **Developing a Consistent Approach to Land Budgeting, Intensification & Greenfield Designation**

Address inconsistencies in implementation of land budgeting, intensification and greenfield designation among municipalities across the GGH. There is a direct relationship between planning for intensification and greenfield densities, and creating land budgets. Approaches taken by municipalities to calculate their land needs to accommodate urban growth can vary widely; this has important implications for the amount of farmland that will be urbanized to accommodate forecasted growth.

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<sup>9</sup> Neptis Foundation, Understanding the Fundamentals of the Growth Plan, Mar 2015

The Province needs to be clear and consistent when setting intensification requirements for municipalities across the GGH. And municipalities need to be consistent in how they designate greenfield areas. Currently municipalities are applying the 50 people and jobs per hectare requirement in the Growth Plan differently, with some excluding more “undevelopable” land than others from their calculations. This skews numbers and can create favourable density target numbers or artificial rationale for urban boundary expansions. A better, more consistent approach to regional growth management is needed that enables effective Growth Plan implementation that is comparable from one municipality to the next:

- Develop a standardized method for calculating municipal land budgets. Require that all municipalities conform to this method. Support land budgeting that is forward-looking and expects land density and intensification targets to be achieved with a greater diversity of housing types (eg. Waterloo Region, as mentioned above), rather than calculating land needs based on historical development patterns.
- Develop a standardized method for calculating designated greenfield area densities that restricts “take-outs” to policy-protected natural features identified in section 2.2.7.3. Inappropriate take-outs like golf courses should not be allowed to artificially raise greenfield density numbers or be used to justify urban boundary expansion. Require that all municipalities conform to the standard method presented by MMAH.
- As stated above, maintain a consistent and minimum intensification and density standard for all municipalities, including outer-ring municipalities, that goes beyond the standard quo.
- Require upper-tier municipalities to direct the majority of growth to existing urbanized areas or to lower-tier municipalities that are more urban in character. Upper-tier municipalities must establish a clear relationship between a lower-tier municipality’s size, location and capacity and its assigned intensification rate. Prohibit arbitrary and inconsistent distribution of minimum intensification targets by upper-tier municipalities, as seen in early implementation of the Growth Plan in many communities.

### **Establishing Firm Urban Boundaries**

Suspend any further expansion of settlement area boundaries in the GGH until consistency is established among all municipalities in land budgeting, intensification targets and designation of greenfield areas. Effectiveness of Growth Plan policies must be fully understood, a full suite of implementation tools and supports in place, and adequate monitoring frameworks established before expansions can be considered.

264,650 acres of land, the majority prime agricultural land, has already been designated for future urban growth across the Growth Plan area – this is an enormous amount of land 1.5 times the area of the City of Toronto.<sup>10</sup> Unfortunately these urban land designations again represent the status quo, with 80% of the area having already been designated before the Growth Plan came into effect, and the remainder added as part of the Growth Plan land budgeting process. Land held in these designations today is sufficient to accommodate all population and employment growth through the 2031-2041 planning horizon in a sprawling, business-as-usual scenario.<sup>11</sup> The designated area could accommodate even more growth if intensification and density targets were increased, and this should be a priority. The timing is right to:

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<sup>10</sup> Neptis Foundation, *Implementing the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe*, 2013

<sup>11</sup> Neptis Foundation, *Understanding the Fundamentals of the Growth Plan*, Mar 2015

- Establish firm urban boundaries to be maintained for at least the next 20-25 years; establish permanent boundaries where significant farmlands and agricultural communities are affected. Firm boundary lines should follow existing urban boundary lines. Stronger urban boundaries are the key missing piece of the current Growth Plan and a necessary complement to intensification and density targets that will lead toward truly effective implementation and on-the-ground results. It will force the focus of growth inward within existing settlement areas and built-up areas, rather than perpetuating outward-facing urban sprawl and Greenbelt leap-frog development into prime agricultural areas. There is growing consensus among community stakeholders that firm urban boundaries are needed, with much more rigorous review and justification of boundary expansions.
- Introduce meaningful penalties/consequences for municipalities that fail to meet intensification and density targets or seek to prematurely expand their urban growth boundaries (eg. loss of greenfield growth privileges/options).

### **Protecting the Whitebelt**

Preserve Whitebelt lands for their continued agricultural use and function. The 113,668 acre Whitebelt area, the zone between the urbanized Greater Toronto Area and the Greenbelt, contains some of the best, Class 1 farmland in Canada. It should not be assumed by the Province, municipalities or the development industry that this is an area “in waiting” for future urban development; this is the ‘sprawl mentality’ that the Growth Plan and its implementation should be countering. As mentioned above, a significant amount of farmland has already been designated for a generation of urban development in the region; there is no immediate need for the Whitebelt lands to be considered for urban use. Emphasis needs to be maintained on redevelopment and higher density developments inside existing settlement areas with firm urban boundaries.

### **Managing Leapfrog Development Pressures**

Prevent “leapfrog” forms of development that undermine land conservation and growth management objectives. There have been many concerns raised about the Growth Plan facilitating leapfrog development over the Greenbelt policy area and onto prime agricultural land. This is particularly apparent in the Simcoe sub-area amendment to the Growth Plan that pushes significant urban growth into Simcoe County and encourages stand-alone development on thousands of acres of productive farmland along Highway 400. A core principle of the Growth Plan is to direct new development to existing settlement areas and along transit corridors to reduce urban sprawl and highway congestion. The Growth Plan must not actively enable displacement of growth from the inner-ring GTA to outer-ring municipalities by opening up large tracts of land to residential and highway development, exacerbating commuter traffic and pushing urban land uses into core agricultural areas.

Nearly half of the land designated for urbanization across the GGH is in outer-ring municipalities, beyond the Greenbelt, even though the outer-ring is only expected to attract one-third as many new residents and one-quarter as many jobs as inner-ring communities. This suggests that Ontario will see much more low-density, car-oriented leapfrog development in the coming years that is contrary to the intent of the Growth Plan, yet enabled by it. These fundamental contradictions must be resolved.

### **Creating Buffers to Shield Farms from Urban Conflict**

Require buffers between urban uses and agriculture along the rural-urban interface. When new urban developments encroach upon existing farming operations higher incidences of trespassing, vandalism, conflicts with pets and littering/dumping of garbage are common. This can be mitigated by requiring

new developments to install buffers, fences and signage when abutting agricultural land/in interface areas. This should be common practice; provincial guidance on edge planning is needed.

### **Developing Agricultural Growth Plans**

Invest in the economic viability and growth of the GGH food and farming sector through Agricultural Growth Plans. One of the criticisms of the GGH Growth Plan from farmers is that its focus is largely on urban growth and the vast contributions of the region's agriculture and agri-food sector to the economy and quality of life in the GGH are not widely recognized. There is strong interest in a Growth Plan that directly supports economic opportunities, investment and infrastructure development for local food and agriculture in the GGH. There is interest in a Growth Plan that rewards farmers for the "green infrastructure" they provide, including support for the provision of ecological goods and services and farmland protection via agricultural easements (see Farms Forever below).

Section 4.2.2.1. of the Growth Plan enables the creation of Agricultural Growth Plans through sub-area assessments, working with municipalities and farm stakeholders to identify prime agricultural areas for enhanced policy protection and investment in the GGH. Establishing Agricultural Growth Plans would be groundbreaking and open up important opportunities to sustain vibrant near-urban agricultural communities, invigorate investment in GGH farms, and advance local food systems development to feed the region's growing population.

### **Enabling Growth Plan Implementation with Additional Resources & Support**

Provide more incentives and support to municipalities and the development community that will enable more timely and effective Growth Plan implementation. Ten years after the Growth Plan was introduced, few municipalities have updated their zoning by-laws to enable high density, transit-oriented development in conformity with the Growth Plan. Delayed updates to official plans and zoning by-laws have resulted in the conversion of tens of thousands of acres of productive agricultural land to the low-density urban sprawl at the periphery of nearly every community in the GGH.

Assist municipalities that are slow to conform to provincial plans or struggling to update Official Plans and zoning by-laws, working with them to determine what challenges and factors are contributing to delayed implementation. MMAH must recognize limited planning capacity in rural municipalities and provide solutions to build capacity and provide the human resources needed to support conformity exercises. Additional provincial input and guidance can help to inform these processes and accelerate local efforts.

There is also an element of local political and community resistance to intensification, which has caused additional delays and become a significant challenge for Growth Plan implementation. The building industry is frustrated with slow approvals and Ontario Municipal Board challenges associated with high density development proposals that exemplify the Growth Plan vision. Require municipalities to proactively pre-zone for appropriate mixed-use densities along existing and future transit corridors. This supports the significant provincial investments being made in public transit and intensification goals. It would also prevent extensive delays and costs that the building industry is otherwise forced to absorb at the OMB to get upgrades to municipal zoning.

Forms of development favoured in the Growth Plan - higher density, infill, redevelopment and transit-oriented developments within existing built-up areas – should be made easier and more cost-effective to develop than greenfield areas, and viewed as more desirable locations for the building industry to

invest. While policy language is supportive, additional provincial and municipal fiscal tools and incentives are now needed for full implementation, such as funds for brownfield clean-up and redevelopment.

One avenue is the Development Charges Act. Currently applied inconsistently across the GGH, development charges are very impactful at guiding growth and could be used better to encourage intensification and minimize greenfield development. Unfortunately, the application of development charges in most Ontario municipalities is encouraging urban sprawl and inefficient land development, and increasing the costs of municipal servicing at the expense of existing taxpayers.<sup>12</sup> The result is unnecessary or premature urban development on productive farmland. The following recommendations could improve the impact of development charges and help Growth Plan goals to be achieved:

- Require municipalities to differentiate between development on greenfields and development in urbanized areas, and provide incentives for the types of development that make more efficient use of land. Municipalities should use development charge systems to incentivize and encourage growth in areas where services already exist and are underused, rather than incentivizing greenfield development. Greenfield development, which is more costly to build, service and maintain, should face higher development charges. Infill and high-density development should be subject to development charge discounting.
- Encourage maximum development charges on greenfield sites identified as Class 1-3 prime agricultural land. This requirement would create a disincentive for urban sprawl on greenfields and help to direct development away from farming areas. This could be coupled with a development “offsetting” mechanism to help fund the permanent protection of certain community farmlands when others are permanently lost to urban use (see more below).
- Provide more support to local governments, helping them adopt best practices for calculation and use of development charges in a way that discourages sprawl onto greenfield sites.

### **Creating Performance Indicators for Monitoring Progress on Farmland Preservation**

Monitor the Growth Plan’s effectiveness at protecting agricultural lands and mitigating their loss to urbanization throughout the GGH. Current performance indicators for the Greenbelt and Growth Plan are underdeveloped and inadequate to monitor progress on achieving a core objective of these Plans: protecting against the loss and fragmentation of the agricultural land base. While it is good to see the release of initial performance indicators and results on lot creation and forest and wetland cover, the data falls short of measuring real impacts on the agricultural land base.

It is disappointing that there is no public communication on the Province’s effort to quantify the amount of farmland that has been effectively protected or lost over the past ten years during implementation of the Greenbelt and Growth Plan. Trends could at least be presented to the public in general terms. For example, high level analysis of Census of Agriculture data gathered for the five-year period 2006-2011 indicates that area farmed in the Greenbelt decreased by 59,397 acres, farmed area in the Golden Horseshoe decreased by 65,148 acres and farmed area in the outer Golden Horseshoe decreased by 96,139.<sup>13</sup> These numbers don’t tell the whole story but at least present a starting point and would show trends until a methodology is developed to collect data and adequately measure effectiveness of Greenbelt and Growth Plan policies in this area

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<sup>12</sup> Environmental Defence, *The High Cost of Sprawl*, 2013

<sup>13</sup> Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation, *Agriculture by the Numbers: Understanding the Greenbelt’s Unique Advantages*, 2014

- Develop a monitoring and reporting process, and lead data collection and analysis, in cooperation with municipalities, that accurately measures how much agricultural land exists in the Greenbelt and Growth Plan policy areas, how much of this land is designated for long-term protection within Prime Agricultural Areas, how much land is held in other municipal designations (eg. rural areas, settlement expansion areas, etc.), and what lands are being re-designated for other uses over time. This will provide real benchmarks by which to monitor the Growth Plan's success at curbing urban sprawl and protecting the GGH's valuable farmlands.

## **Other Tools to Support Implementation of Plan Objectives**

With a strong land use planning framework in place in Ontario, including the Greenbelt, ORMCP, NEP and GGH Growth Plan, now is the time to begin investing in new tools and approaches that will truly achieve policy goals of *permanent* farmland protection. While policy provides the foundation for coordinated growth management and land conservation, land use plans are only as strong as the public and political desire to maintain and implement them, and are always subject to change by future governments regardless of the intent and commitment expressed today. Effective implementation and success of the four plans requires provincial investment, incentives and strong community partnerships. In addition to ideas already presented above, new tools and approaches are needed to guarantee the permanent protection of Ontario farmlands and sustainability of agriculture in the Greenbelt and GGH.

Partnerships with land trusts and municipalities to secure farmland protection easement agreements with landowners along urban boundaries and Greenbelt boundaries, for example, would permanently protect highly valuable agricultural areas as a value-add implementation approach that reinforces and makes actionable those policies intended to establish lasting protection for farmland and limit urban sprawl. It is critical that investments in such strategic partnerships and programs are pursued today with the long-term vision in mind – not 25 years from now when pressure to change Greenbelt boundaries or diminish land conservation policy is further intensified, and when it may no longer be possible to 'hold the line.'

### **Partnering with Land Trusts & Communities to Enable Permanent Farmland Protection**

Work collaboratively with farmers, other private landowners, land trusts and municipal partners; empower them to take leadership and action to strategically and permanently protect farmlands in a way that buffers and prevents loss of farmland to shifting political commitment in the future. It is critical that policy areas like the Greenbelt continue to be permanently protected and not whittled away by future governments who may be under pressure to open up protected areas for non-agricultural development, as currently being witnessed in British Columbia's Agricultural Land Reserve and greenbelts in the U.K. Ontario is in the unique position, with capable partners and tools like agricultural easements available, to enable a robust, strong farmland protection regime in the GGH and throughout Ontario that will stand the test of time and provide a long-term, lasting farmland protection legacy.

### **Launching a 'Farms Forever' Agricultural Easement Program**

Work with the Ministry of Agriculture, Food & Rural Affairs to follow through on Premier Kathleen Wynne's commitment to create a Farms Forever agricultural easement program. These easements, also known as farmland protection easement agreements or conservation easements, are agreements established between willing farmers and land trusts or government to guarantee that specific farms are protected for agricultural use in perpetuity. Farms protected by easements continue to be owned and managed by farmers. The easement agreements are simply registered on property title and 'run with

the land' forever; they are not affected by changes to land use plans or policies in the future. They are the strongest land protection tool available in Ontario to prevent urban uses on farmland.

Scaling up the use of agricultural easements through a provincial Farms Forever program would be a clear value-add complement to policy, and support implementation of the permanent farmland protection and growth management objectives of provincial plans. Agricultural easements can also be used to support new provincial initiatives, such as expansion of the Greenbelt area and establishment of Agricultural Growth Plans (see above).

Easements can inspire and empower farmers and communities to engage more with planning for the long-term protection and viability of GGH farms. When farmers agree to register an easement on their land they are creating a public benefit and are rewarded with certain tax and financial advantages. This makes the impact of easements greater than the protection of farmland alone; they can help to facilitate farm succession to the next generation of farmers, keep land in farming, spark reinvestment in farming operations, and keep near-urban farmland affordable for farmers. There are organizations like the Ontario Farmland Trust that are already in place that can help the Province develop agricultural easement agreements with farmers and deliver a Farms Forever program in the GGH and throughout the Province.

### **Establishing a Development “Offsetting” Requirement**

Develop an acre-for-acre greenfield “development offsetting” requirement when prime agricultural land is taken out of production and converted to other uses through development approvals and urban expansion. This should also be part of impact mitigation from large infrastructure projects and aggregate pits and quarries. When productive farmland is developed for another use, it is the permanent loss of a unique, limited and non-renewable resource. The new non-farm development replaces the existing agricultural economic activity and ecological function of these working lands. It represents a high cost to society and should be offset with the permanent protection of remaining agricultural lands in the community. Currently the farm community faces perpetual loss of farmland in the GGH and across the Province, undermining the long-term sustainability of Ontario’s agriculture and agri-food sector. A development “offsetting” requirement would at least begin to provide permanent protection of significant areas of farmland with assurance that investments in farms can continue and a future for farming can be secured.

The development offsetting approach should not be used as an enabling mechanism for greenfield development, but to help implement and achieve Greenbelt and Growth Plan land protection and growth management policies and objectives. It would raise the costs associated with greenfield development, encouraging intensification rather than sprawl. A development offsetting requirement would also provide direct support for provincial and municipal agricultural planning and investments in GGH agriculture, particularly by funding establishment of agricultural easement agreements with farmers in agricultural areas designated for long-term protection (more on easements above). It should be synergistic with OMAFRA’s Farms Forever program (see above) and greenland securement programs of GGH municipalities.

Require that land permanently lost to agriculture be “offset” with the permanent protection of at least an equivalent amount of farmland (1:1 ratio, ideally higher to acknowledge that farmland is an irreplaceable resource). Such a requirement could be mandatory for all greenfield development, or introduced on a smaller scale to start, with a targeted focus on mitigating impacts of highly public and

controversial development projects and proposals that threaten prime farmlands. This includes urban boundary expansions and the GTA West Transportation Corridor.

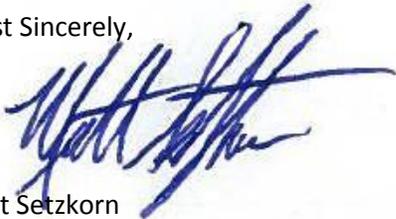
### **Supporting Land Conservation with Ontario's Cap-and-Trade Climate Initiative**

Link land conservation and growth management to Ontario's climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts. Collaborate with the Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change on development of their cap-and-trade initiative for reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. Recent research shows that per acre greenhouse gas emissions from urban land uses are 58 times greater than emissions from agricultural lands.<sup>14</sup> This is additional argument for expedited implementation of the Growth Plan, higher intensification and density targets and more aggressive protection of urban adjacent farmlands.

Invest a portion of the revenues generated through the cap-and-trade system in the permanent protection of farmland via agricultural easements, as described above, to complement OMAFRA's Farms Forever program and new development offsetting requirements. This could be modeled after California's cap and trade initiative that funds the state's Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation Program, a cost-share grant program for agricultural easements that leverages land trust expertise and municipal development offsetting revenues.

This concludes the Ontario Farmland Trust's submission on the *2015 Co-ordinated Review of the Growth Plan for Greater Golden Horseshoe, Greenbelt Plan, Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan and Niagara Escarpment Plan*. Thank you again for the opportunity to share our concerns and observations on the impact that these four Plans have had on the protection of Ontario farmland over the past ten years, as well as the opportunities we see for improvements to the Plans and their implementation to this aim. We invite discussion and welcome any questions you might have regarding our submission. We look forward to working with the Province further to advance the protection of Ontario's agricultural land resources and our vibrant farming communities.

Most Sincerely,



Matt Setzkorn  
Executive Director

cc:

Board of Directors, Ontario Farmland Trust  
The Honourable Ted McMeekin, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing  
The Honourable Jeff Leal, Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs  
MMAH 2015 Co-ordinated Land Use Planning Review Advisory Panel  
Greenbelt Council Members

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<sup>14</sup> American Farmland Trust, A New Comparison of Greenhouse Gas Emissions from California Agricultural and Urban Land Uses, 2015