



December 13, 2022

Pickering City Council  
One The Esplanade  
Pickering ON L1V 6K7

Re: Call for Appraising the Public Value in Duffins Rouge Agricultural Preserve

Dear Pickering City Council,

The Ontario Farmland Trust (OFT) learned that on December 4, 2022, Pickering City Council voted to reject Bill 39, which includes the Duffins Rouge Agricultural Preserve Repeal Act. We applaud your stance against this Act and the removal of these protections. We invite you to join us in our call for transparency of the value of the public interest that was invested in these lands. We encourage you to have an independent appraisal conducted to determine the value of the public investment being freely given to private real estate investors.

OFT uses conservation easement agreements (CEA) as a tool to protect agricultural lands. Our expertise with this tool enables us to understand that when a CEA is put in place, landowners are compensated for the reduced fair market value with a charitable tax receipt, representing the public interest that is now held in trust. An independent appraisal is done each time we place a CEA for transparency and accountability to understand the value being donated for the preservation of the public interest in maintaining lands in agriculture. Our duty as the easement holder is to protect that public interest and ensure the CEA is followed. The unique part of the Duffins Rouge Agricultural Preserve lands is that the government was the landowner at the time the CEAs were applied and therefore they sold the lands at a reduced rate to the new landowners. The discounted value effectively represented the public interest, the CEAs were to protect that interest, and the City of Pickering became the easement holders.

Unfortunately, these easements were not committed to and the City of Pickering removed easements on two-thirds of the properties. To reaffirm the public interest and protect those lands, the Duffins Rouge Agricultural Preserve Act was created and reaffirmed the CEAs and the protection of the public interest in these lands.

Here we are, yet again, faced with an unfortunate reality of the public interests being released. The Ontario Farmland Trust believes an independent appraisal should be conducted in order to understand the full value of the public interest that is being freely given away to private real estate investors, which is now worth millions, if not more. We simply do not know the value and we believe the public should.



We are writing this open letter so others are aware of our ask. We hope that you stand behind your vote against the repeal and to shine light on the impact this is going to have for the residents of Pickering and the rest of Ontarians that all have a stake in these lands being protected for our food production.

Thank you sincerely for your leadership and your dedication to preserving agriculture in your municipality.

Yours Sincerely,

Martin Straathof  
Executive Director  
Ontario Farmland Trust

### **Ontario Farmland Trust**

The Ontario Farmland Trust is a non-profit, charitable organization that works across Ontario to protect farmlands and associated agricultural, natural and cultural features of the countryside for the benefit of current and future generations.

There are three components of OFT's work: (1) direct land protection, using agricultural easements, (2) farmland policy development and (3) research and education.

### **Quick Farmland Facts**

- The latest 2016-2021 Census of Agriculture shows an increase in farmland loss to 319 acres per day from 175 acres in the 2011-2016 census
- Ontario's farmland is the foundation of the agri-food sector that contributes \$47 billion in GDP to the provincial economy
- Southern Ontario has the most productive farmland in all of Canada
- Combined with Ontario's moderate climate, this land can produce a greater diversity of crops than anywhere else in the county – over 200 different food and agricultural commodities
- Only five per cent of Ontario contains the soil types needed to support agriculture
- Ontario has lost 2.8 million acres of farmland in the past 35 years