

“GREENBELT - RE-DISTRIBUTING WEALTH BY GOVERNMENT DECREE”

ONTARIO PROPERTY AND ENVIRONMENTAL RIGHTS ALLIANCE

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MEMO TO: OPERA Members **FROM:** R.A. (Bob) Fowler , OPERA Secretary **DATE:** February 26, 2008

Ratified by Queen’s Park in June, 2005, the Greenbelt Act transfers, by regulation without compensation, economic control of almost 2 million acres of land in the Greater Toronto Area, much of it privately owned, to the provincial government. The legislation was strongly supported, if not covertly initiated, by the Greenbelt Alliance, a coalition of special interest groups consisting of some 80 members under the leadership of the Canadian office of Environmental Defence, a militant U.S. environmental Non-Government Organization (NGO). Details of administrative and operational activities so far conducted under the Act appear on numerous Internet web pages from which the following synopsis has been prepared.

An appointed Greenbelt Council, a government tribunal with nine members, most with strong academic credentials within the environmental industry, answers to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs for overall supervision of the Act. A Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation was also established as a government-private partnership consisting of four Municipal Affairs nominees, one of whom may be a member of the Niagara Escarpment Commission, four nominees chosen by the Board of Directors and one member nominated by the Oak Ridges Moraine Foundation. According to Internet sources, this Foundation answers to the Ministry of Tourism and is responsible for dispensing \$25 million from the public purse over five years to fund activities and programs that support Foundation-approved land uses in or near the Greenbelt.

In August 2005, a former Executive Director of Environmental Defence, the leading Greenbelt Alliance NGO, was appointed Executive Director of the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation. At the same time an executive of another Alliance member, the Federation of Ontario Naturalists, was appointed to the Foundation Board of Directors. In its November 2007 progress report to the Ontario government the Greenbelt Council advocated expansion of Greenbelt boundaries as well as cross-appointments of Directors between the Council and the Greenbelt Foundation, the Oak Ridges Moraine Foundation and the Niagara Escarpment Commission. That report also noted the Foundation’s “Measuring Success of the Greenbelt” July 2007 meeting “brought a range of stakeholders together to provide a forum for various stakeholders and groups (e.g. Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Niagara Escarpment Commission, Monitoring the Moraine, Oak Ridges Moraine Foundation) to discuss various approaches to monitoring the Greenbelt”. (No affected landowners invited or need apply!)

By November 2007, the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation had distributed more than \$9 million among a variety of grantees including a number of Greenbelt Alliance members such as the Federation of Ontario Naturalists who received \$235,000.00 and Environmental Defence who received \$600,000.00 over three years. An Ontario university was granted \$462,000 while four members of the Conservation Council of Ontario, another Greenbelt Alliance member, shared \$2,687,000 from this initial \$9 million draw on the \$25 million Greenbelt promotion fund.

As noted above, the approved guest list for the Foundation’s 2007 “Measuring Success of the Greenbelt” meeting did not include rural landowners directly affected by the Act. In the contrived absence of those primary stakeholders, “measuring success” translates as ensuring a predetermined outcome with no public input. In our view, this is an exercise ideally matched to the inclination and experience of those government bureaucrats and NGOs determined to transform private property into a public resource without paying for it. However, several concerned but uninvited landowners did attend the forum in question and were there promised a copy of its relevant Minutes, a commitment never since honored. On their behalf and in order to up-date its Greenbelt file, OPERA has twice asked in vain for a copy of all 2007 Foundation meetings. After receiving these requests, the Foundation Executive Director evidently instructed his staff not to prepare Minutes of Foundation meetings, saying, “We do not keep Minutes of such meetings. There is no need for them and it is thus a waste of time to write them up”. However, months after the fact he did provide some appellants with secretarial notes of the “success measurement” meeting.

The Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation has stated its management and funding activities are transparent and accountable. The foregoing summary does not support that claim. Accordingly, OPERA will continue to question disbursement of 25 million dollars of taxpayer money by an appointed committee of unelected individuals some of whose past or present employers supported, if not initiated, legislation under which those same employers appear to benefit

“to protect, and entrench in law, landowner rights and responsibilities”