

“BIGGER IS NOT ALWAYS BETTER”

ONTARIO PROPERTY AND ENVIRONMENTAL RIGHTS ALLIANCE

Unit “A”, 135 Church Street, North, Mount Forest, Ontario, N0G 2L2

Phone: (519) 323-2308 / Fax: (519) 323-0289 / E-Mail: opera@bmts.com / Web Page: www.bmts.com/~opera/

MEMO TO: OPERA Members & Supporters **FROM:** R.A. (Bob) Fowler, OPERA Secretary

COPY TO: <http://www.bmts.com/~opera/> **DATE:** April 14, 2007

RE: Promoting Greenbelt Expansion

Ontario Nature, a subsidiary of the Federation of Ontario Naturalists, recently published a “Greenbelt Expansion Action Alert” that encourages Ontario citizens to actively support current efforts of the provincial government to enlarge the Golden Horseshoe Greenbelt.

Given existing public interest in the “green revolution”, this appeal is timely, articulate, reasoned, and professional. It will undoubtedly resonate with a majority of urban readers whose lives may benefit from more provincial regulation while their economic prospects remain undisturbed. However, private owners or lessees of rural land directly affected by arbitrary expansion of the Greenbelt, a 1.8 million acre tract of Ontario real estate already surrendered to provincial control without an appeal mechanism much less capital compensation, may subscribe to a different view.

For one thing, Greenbelt enthusiasts insist the program protects farmland. Seldom mentioned is the fact that the business of farming is, in some areas and markets, an occupation that’s sinking into oblivion, not from a shortage of agricultural land but, rather, from low commodity prices and subsidized foreign competition. For another, the provincial Places to Grow Act estimates that 4 million additional people will arrive in south-western Ontario within ten years. Such prophesies, if accurate and realized, will surely impose enormous pressures on current and future Greenbelt anti-development prohibitions.

The Greenbelt expansion initiative seems rooted in provincial appeals for municipal co-operation with no proviso so far published that would require public meetings of local constituents to review necessary changes in local Official Plans. In addition, the manner in which the original Greenbelt was hastily conceived, studied, legislated and funded raises questions of transparency and accountability which, not surprisingly, migrate to current efforts for extension of its geographic boundaries and regulatory clout.

For reader interest and information, Internet sources indicate the Greenbelt concept was advocated and perhaps initiated by the Greenbelt Alliance, an 80-member coalition of special interest groups including Ontario Nature. The program is supervised by an unelected Greenbelt Council consisting of seven appointees all with strong academic and bureaucratic credentials. In late 2007 this Council urged the provincial government to expand the Greenbelt through municipal solicitation. The original Greenbelt program is supported by a \$25 million provincial grant over 5 years. This fund is managed by a Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation whose Board of Directors rosters executives of professional lobbyists including Ontario Nature. In the initial \$9 million distribution of Greenbelt funding, Ontario Nature received \$235,000.00 for an undertaking entitled Greenbelt Connections for which details and a related progress report may be available but are not yet widely circulated.

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