

“DOUBLE-DIPPING IN THE PUBLIC TROUGH”

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/

April 6, 2011

The Honorable Dalton McGuinty, Premier
Province of Ontario
Room 281, Main Legislative Building
Queen's Park
Toronto, Ontario, M7A 1A4

Registered Surface Mail

Premier McGuinty:

Re: 2011 Ontario Provincial Budget

The recently released Ontario budget expresses strong support for the Greenbelt Act, a statute that unilaterally transferred economic control of almost 2 million acres of land, most of it privately owned, to the provincial government. It also trumpets the financial and administrative skills of the Greenbelt's unelected managers. Specifically, the budget document announces that "since 2005 the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation has provided grants and leveraged outside funding, resulting in \$76 million for the farming and environmental sectors" and "the government will invest \$20 million in the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation to enable it to leverage further investments".

This Foundation was originally awarded \$25 million from Ontario's public purse for disbursement over five years to promote its Greenbelt vision. Of this largesse, we understand about \$5 million had been expended by 2009 to support selected programs and, of that total, almost \$1 million had been divided between three Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) whose executives were Foundation Directors at the time. Apart from ethical issues and arithmetical details, whether the \$20 million Foundation grant in the current budget represents "new" funding or residual, unspent, perhaps unaccountable monies from a previous provincial gift is an open question.

The Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation, like its associate cartel, the Oak Ridges Moraine Foundation, is in effect an NGO with a surfeit of political influence but very little fiscal or public accountability. Through shared belief and common purpose such groups have created a rich sinecure for themselves as government consultant-advisors within the hugely profitable environmental industry. From that special corner of the political universe their sweeping assurances of positive results are seldom, if ever, verified by publicly available written financial statements detailing all income including otherwise unpublished subsidies and all direct and indirect costs.

Preaching a polished gospel of looming environmental melt-down often based on unproven science, unsupported evidence and unrealistic models, these professional lobbyists in concert with senior Queen's Park bureaucrats dominate formation of land use policy in Ontario today. Indeed, some government mandarins retiring from land use bureaucracies such as the Ministry of Natural Resources are reported to immediately and seamlessly embark on a civilian career with one of the very NGOs with whom they previously collaborated. In any case, powerful coalitions such as Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation appear to function as a shadow Cabinet with an unwritten license to manipulate free enterprise by regulation without adequate public oversight and often outside the rule of law. In the guise of ecological necessity they're entrusted with millions of taxpayer dollars to fund objectives of their own choosing, convene Board meetings for which no minutes are publicly released and approve transfer of taxpayer dollars to programs for which relevant cost-benefit performance reports are not publicly circulated.

Improperly self-defined as “stakeholders”, these special interest partnerships betray the principles of that benign title through systemic abuse of common law and natural justice. In a climate of minimal, if any, transparency or accountability they have prompted successive Ontario governments to incrementally dilute use, title, mortgage worth and market value of privately owned land, particularly rural land. Thus, with questionable legislation and draconian regulation, which denies to affected (read afflicted) Ontario citizens the democratic right of appeal and compensation, are private lives and property filtered through an unelected and unregulated confederacy totally indifferent to any opinion or interests other than its own.

In our view, impressive Greenbelt progress referenced in the 2011 Ontario budget, especially as it pertains to the agricultural community, borders on hypocrisy. Mixing optimistic lump sum estimates of “leveraged” successes with warm accolades for NGO managers, the budget document, not surprisingly, is careful to ignore inconvenient truths thereby accumulated such as diminished land values, restricted farm practices and “leap-frog” urban development pressures on adjacent farm land with resulting destabilization of municipal Official Plans.

Public outrage emerging from attempts of an incumbent provincial government to impose and centralize unto itself flagrantly predatory land use controls is nowhere better demonstrated at the present time than in Alberta. The controversy in full flame there will undoubtedly dominate the next election in that province and may, in fact, dislodge the incumbent regime, an administration that has enjoyed majority public support for the past 40 years.

Political rhetoric (read damage control) to mitigate consequences of the Alberta statutes at issue is not dissimilar to Ontario’s budget claim of multiplying fiscal triumphs attributed to the Greenbelt Act as promoted, interpreted and supervised by consultant-lobbyists. We suggest, with respect, that land use proscriptions rushed to legislation with active help and covert manipulation of unelected NGOs who are then appointed and presumably paid to manage them might give voters pause for thought in Ontario’s next electoral contest.

As a public service coalition, OPERA encourages Internet and media circulation of the views expressed herein.

Yours truly

R. A. (Bob) Fowler, Secretary
Ontario Property and Environmental Rights Alliance

c.c. Honorable Dwight Duncan, Minister of Finance
Honorable Carol Mitchell, Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs
Opposition Critics
Alberta Landowner Coalition
Media File

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