

Halton Region votes to support possible Greenbelt expansion

Lack of public consultation problematic, says Halton Hills mayor

Halton Region council has voted in favour of supporting the province in a study to further expand the Greenbelt in the region.

The council voted in favour of the move, despite a number of concerns voiced by mayors and council members around a lack of public consultation on the matter.

"Halton Hills is 50 per cent protected by the NEC (Niagara Escarpment Commission)," said Mayor Rick Bonnette. "You might as well build a moat around it."

He says the Greenbelt expansion would affect the flexibility of Halton Hills' long-term financial plans.

"To expand this without any public consultation," he said. "I appreciate Mayor Burton looking at ways to expand it, but the fact remains that Oakville has zero space for development."

Oakville Mayor Rob Burton says that he put forth the motion as a way protecting his own municipality from greater density.

"We are trying to control growth," said Burton, in order to preserve the livability of Oakville for future generations.

"If you open up the whitebelt, it's going to unbalance every-



Alexandra Heck / Metroland

Oakville Mayor Rob Burton put forward a motion at Halton Region council to support the province in studying an expansion of the Greenbelt protected lands in the area.

thing."

The whitebelt regions in question are undeveloped lands that lie south of Georgetown and around Milton.

He explained that by allowing further sprawl of development in the white belt areas, this puts greater pressure for further density in Burlington and Oakville.

"If this motion was going to

go forward, there would have to be more public consultation," said the Halton Hills mayor. "We have a lot of large landowners, we have farmers that could be affected."

"Rest assured, we do have a lot of protection in the whitebelt. We have wetland protection, Niagara escarpment," he said, not to mention source water protections and a slew of other

regulations.

Comments around the horse-shoe were mixed on the motion.

Coun. Colin Best said that there is a greater mindset in the province that's fostering unbridled growth.

"I also disagree that Milton is sprawling," said Best. "What I'd like to see is a provincial plan that matches the growth we have."

Others noted a conflict in the purpose of the motion, stating that if it is supposed to focus on agriculture.

"It's unfortunate that this is coming from Oakville," said Jane Fogal. "This really does speak to the agricultural lands."

Other councillors echoed the need for public consultation, however, the province has set a deadline of March 7 to submit input.

Halton Region staff had completed a report that suggested they not comment on the province's intentions to study expanding the Greenbelt.

"Were it not for Burton's resolution," said one lead planner. "We would have let March 7 go by."

The conclusion of the staff report states that given the current level of protections in the area, staff would not be providing comment on the initiative.

"We don't come to this conversation," said Burlington Coun. Marianne Meed Ward.

"The resolution doesn't sterilize any of the whitebelt lands at this point. All we're saying is that these are important lands for us and they should be included in the study."

Regional chair Gary Carr gave impassioned commentary in support of the motion, stating that the region is facing uncontrolled sprawl as a result of an incessant push for development.

"The way to stop it is this," he said.

The council voted in favour, 12-9.

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