

Farmers slam Province's Greenbelt Draft Plan

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Mr. Gevaert noted that the Greenbelt Task Force, which gathered information for the draft plan, heard over 300 presentations about compensation, but nothing is mentioned in the Greenbelt report. He said farmers want a fair and equitable compensation package that will protect those whose properties come under the Greenbelt Plan.

The draft plan restricts agricultural areas to certain uses. As noted on page eight of the Greenbelt Draft Plan urban expansions are not "permitted onto Prime Agricultural Areas." The report goes on to state that the land is restricted to "a full range of agricultural, agriculture-related and secondary uses." A news release issued by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing also states that agricultural land in the Greenbelt "would be protected for agriculture" and that many uses, such as "residential subdivisions, or golf courses would not be suitable for these areas."

With the potential for restrictive uses on their land, many farmers have voiced concerns that they won't be able to sell their land once they retire. And farmers are also worried that obtaining bank loans will be difficult if their land is redesignated as part of the Greenbelt. As Mr. Gevaert noted, "I don't want a Greenbelt where it does nothing but diminish my equity."



Map of greenbelt

Mr. Gevaert's concerns were shared by other farmers in the audience, including a woman from the Beamsville area, who during an emotional speech expressed doubts about the government's willingness to listen to the farming community. "We want you to respect farmers as much as you respect the land." She went on to stress that just saving farmland in itself wouldn't save the agricultural industry, an opinion shared by Bette Jean Crews, an executive member of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA). Ms. Crews said that simply preserving farmland is short-sighted and overlooks a complex industry that needs to rely on an agricultural infrastructure and farmland as a financial asset rather than a liability.

Bert Andrews, who farms in north Halton, was also quick to point to the complexity of agriculture as an industry. He said he wasn't satisfied with comments made by Victor Doyle. Mr. Doyle, a manager of provincial planning and environmental services with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, helped moderate the meeting along with Mr. Flynn. Mr. Andrews said Mr. Doyle inaccurately stated that the government intends to preserve agriculture as it always has been. "Agriculture is a dynamic, changing business."

Mr. Flynn asked if property tax changes would help alleviate some of the problems faced by farmers and Mr. Andrews agreed that could help, but he stressed that there needs to be a commitment on the part of the government. "We need more than words. We need action."

Aside from dissatisfied farmers at

the meeting, there were many others who attended who lauded the government's efforts to protect the province's natural environment for future generations. The draft, aside from outlining a proposal for protected countryside that includes agricultural lands, also recommends providing protection for three quarters of the lakes, wetlands and forests in the Greenbelt along with a Greenbelt designation for the headwaters of major watersheds, such as Bronte Creek, Sixteen Mile Creek and the Credit River.

Conservation Halton Chair Jean Williams described the plan as "a way to protect and enhance the natural environment of this area and southern Ontario." She praised the government for including the Bronte and Sixteen Mile Creek valleys in its draft, but she felt that the Province should move to protect even more of these valley systems. "We would encourage the Province to include these important river valleys right down to Lake Ontario."

Burlington Ward 3 Councillor John Taylor felt that the plan was a good one as well, but he worried that the plan may not go far enough in protecting the escarpment from the development of a mid-peninsula highway or provide enough teeth to regulate local quarries. Mr. Taylor said the new environmentally strict regulations for quarries outlined in the draft plan commence on or after December 16 of this year. But he stressed that these rules should apply even earlier. "I'm concerned about the Nelson Aggregates expansion plus the Lowndes Holdings Corp. (quarry) pro-

posal in Flamborough."

The government intends to have a final plan ready by December 16, 2004.

In October, the Province introduced Bill 135, the proposed Greenbelt Act that would establish the Greenbelt Plan in the Golden Horseshoe area. The bill received first reading on October 28.

For more information on the Greenbelt, visit www.greenbelt.ontario.ca or call 1-866-751-8082 (TTY 1-866-220-2290)

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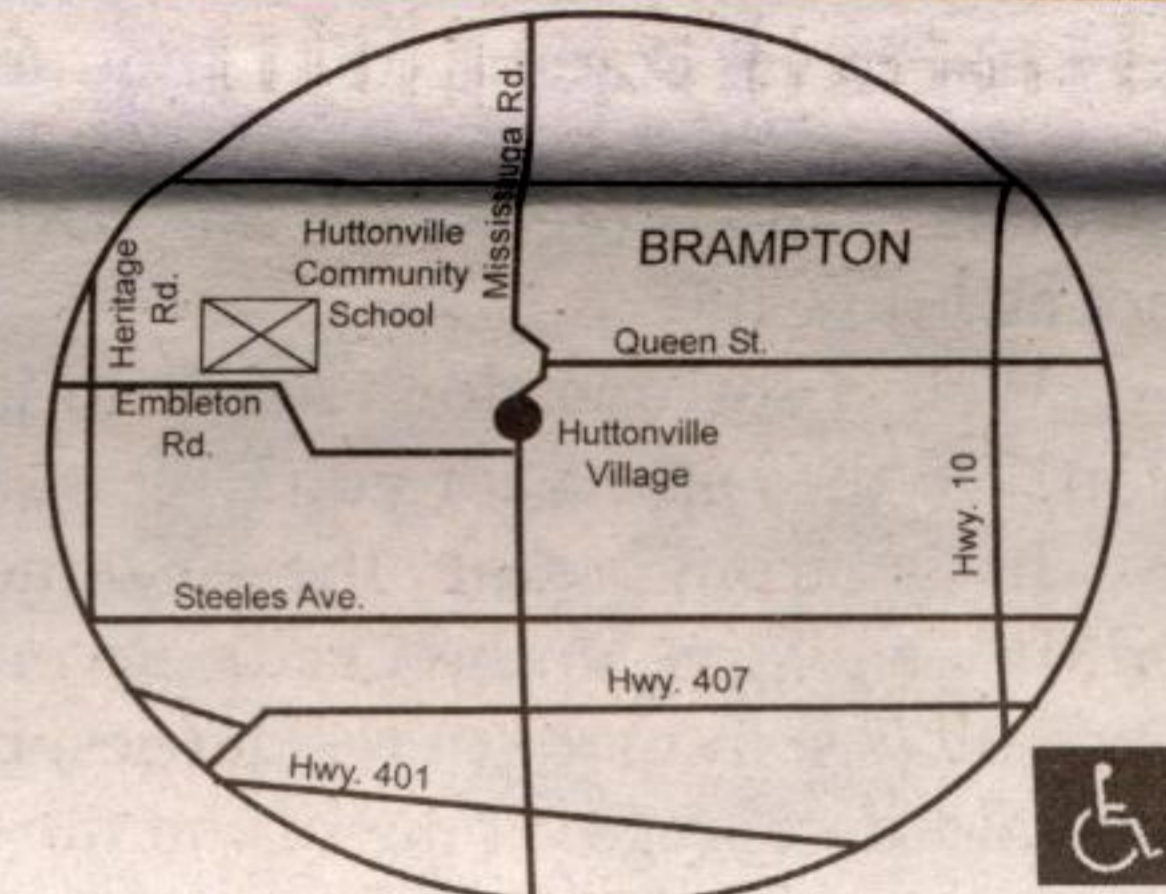
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