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More discussion on greenbelt plan needed—Region

A municipal and regional response paper to the Province's recently-released draft greenbelt plan has been endorsed by Halton council, highlighting the need for more public consultation on proposals of this magnitude.

The plan aims to create a permanent countryside in the Golden Horseshoe region, swathing through Halton. It would encompass the Niagara Escarpment Plan and Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan and also protect natural abutting features, covering about 1.8-million acres from Niagara Falls to Peterborough.

But given the document was only released late last month and the region has to have its comments in by next week, there was little time to consult with residents.

"Public consultation on the draft greenbelt plan and legislation could be improved, both in terms of timeframe and timing," the response paper reads.

"The Province is well advised to allocate more time and opportunities for public consultation in future planning endeavours of this import."

Halton Hills Mayor Rick Bonnette concurred, saying Thursday, "I would have liked to have seen a lot more time."

Some amendments to the response were brought forward to regional council Wednesday, including a request from the Town of Halton Hills to add about 4,000 acres of prime agricultural land separating Milton and Halton Hills to the greenbelt under the protected countryside designation.

But again, since there's a short time-



RICK BONNETTE

'This type of provincial initiative is very controversial. There's going to be people on both sides of the fence on this one.'

frame for the Region's response, the landowners in this area haven't been thoroughly consulted on the potential addition of their lands to the greenbelt—something that raised concerns for Milton and Regional Councillor Barry Lee.

"I'm sympathetic toward what's being proposed here, but I can see this exploding on us," he said.

"This type of provincial initiative is very controversial," said Bonnette. "There's going to be people on both sides of the fence on this one."

Some people will "be upset" and others will be "rejoicing."

Bonnette added he has heard from a couple of landowners whose lands are in the 4,000 acres targeted by Halton Hills council for inclusion in the greenbelt.

"They're disappointed, naturally," said the mayor.

Halton Hills Regional Councillor Clark Somerville said, however, he has heard from a landowner who owns property within the 4,000 acres thanked him for preserving farmland in Ontario.

Bonnette said now that it has a green-

belt the province "is going to have to belly up to the bar" to make sure farmers in the greenbelt have viable farms.

"We have to give the farmers the tools to make sure they are sustainable," said Somerville.

Somerville stressed that the greenbelt plan is not yet approved, and "we don't know what the final product is going to look like."

"It's important for anyone who may object to file with the province," said Somerville.

Lee, who voted against the joint response paper, said he also feels the greenbelt plan will overrule the local planning authority and "sterilize" Nassagaweya.

"The greenbelt will prohibit any hamlet expansion or any innovative planning that we might want to entertain in the future," he said.

Although the Region didn't have enough time to host its own public meeting on the plan, staff e-mailed people on their mailing list from previous provincial planning reform consultations seeking comments, receiving nine submissions to date.

Residents looking to speak their minds on the draft greenbelt plan can visit www.mah.gov.on.ca.

They can also attend the provincial government's final public meeting on the greenbelt plan at Caledon Community Centre, 6215 Old Church Rd. Monday, November 29 from 7 to 10 p.m.

—By *Melanie Hennessey*, special, with files from *Lisa Tallyn*, staff writer



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Julie Pomeroy

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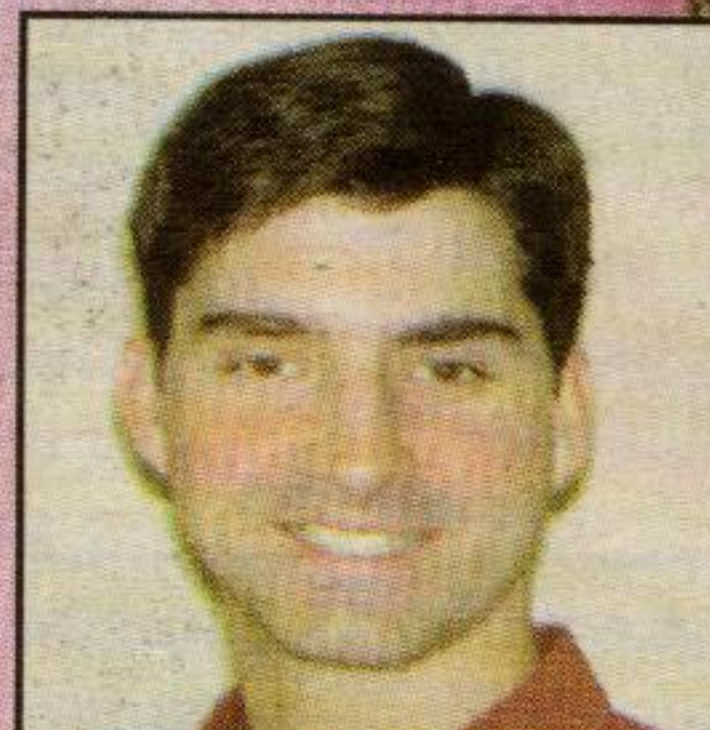
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