

FARMERS, ENVIRONMENTALISTS AND RATEPAYERS FIGHT FOR FARMLAND PRESERVATION



FILE PHOTO/ROB ALARY

Don Chapman (right), shown with his son Joe, says residents must have a prominent voice when it comes to land development in the GTA.

# PLANNING BEFORE PAVING

BY JOAN RANSBERRY  
Staff Writer

Public pressure is being sought in the battle to plan before paving.

The development of lands in the Greater Toronto Area is the driving force behind the establishment of a large lobby group.

"We are squandering valuable lands, paving our green areas and putting housing in locations that result in a vast cost to the province," said John Holtrop, spokesperson for the Greater Toronto Area Land Use Planning Coalition.

"There is no planning, no logic and no sense to the way development is taking place," said Holtrop, a Georgina farmer.

The coalition, made up of more than 30 groups, is launching a campaign to stimulate citizen and community pressure on legislators. The group wants the provincial government to adopt a strategy for the development and protection of lands within the GTA.

A web site — [www.gtalupc.com](http://www.gtalupc.com) — will make it easy for people to get informed and involved, Holtrop said. Through the site, users can send a message to their MPP. It also provides instruction and materials for groups wanting to circulate petitions.

"An immediate step should be a

**'There is no planning, no logic and no sense to the way development is taking place.'**

John Holtrop  
Farmer and lobby group spokesperson

moratorium on the Oak Ridges Moraine and the prime farmland around it," Holtrop said.

"It's an obvious step and, if done, would gain the Harris government all sorts of applause."

Organizations joining the coalition include the South Lake Simcoe Naturalists, Halton Region Federation of Agriculture, Save the Oak Ridges Moraine (STORM), the Citizens Alliance of Uxbridge, the Coalition for a Better Georgina, Lake Simcoe Marine Heritage, the Lakewatch Society, Jackson's Point West Ratepayers Association. As well, individuals from Queensville, King Township, Richmond Hill, Markham, Stouffville and Newmarket are taking an active part in the new group.

"There is a common ground between the agricultural community and the environmental-conservation movement," STORM executive director Debbe Crandall said.

"All of us are concerned about the fate of the land. In particular, we have to make people realize the value of our farmland."

The group's mission statement emphasizes the need to recognize the components within the GTA and their interdependence, including the Oak Ridges Moraine, the viable agricultural lands, green space, farmlands, woodlands, wetlands and rural communities.

"There is a recognition of the need for economic development, including necessary infrastructure," said Holtrop, a cash crop farmer who operates a family farm.

Queensville vegetable farmer Don Chapman said the grassroots effort must have a "distinct and prominent voice" when it comes to proposed land development.

"When the (housing) projects come up at the municipal level of government, the people need to be given a better chance to be heard," he said. "We definitely need more grassroots input."

Chapman grows 900 acres of vegetables and is passionate about protecting farmland. "I don't want the farm issue to be lost in the shuffle. The loss of prime farmland is too important an issue."

Much of the local farmland has already been lost to urban development. In the past two decades, York Region lost a total of 50,000 acres of prime land to urbanization. In 1976, York had about 2,000 farms. The number has dwindled to 1,200, Holtrop said.

The future of farming is very much at risk and, more importantly, food production is in jeopardy, he said. If farms disappear, "so will food", he added.

However, the coalition is "not anti-development", Holtrop said.

"We simply want a logical and planned balance between development and protection. Right now, there is no balance — farmlands and environmentally sensitive areas like the Oak Ridges Moraine are being sacrificed."

Members of the new group are convinced that land use and planning seldom go hand in hand. "No thought is being given to the future," Holtrop said. "There are legitimate needs for development and housing, but there should be in areas defined within a considered plan."

For more information on the GTA Land Use Planning Coalition, call Debbe Crandall at (905) 880-3465, Wynn Walters at (905) 649-3330, John Holtrop at (905) 476-2038 or Peter Lambrick at (905) 854-9457.

## REGIONAL News Digest



### WHAT'S HAPPENING

'50s and '60s dance  
Saturday, Feb. 19, 8 p.m.  
College Restaurant and Bar  
7880 Keele St. at Hwy. 7

Alan Drenfeld of the Windy Ridge band, Lynn Ziraldo of the Learning Disabilities Association and student Luke Frazer are set to rock the night away in benefit of the LDA. Tickets are \$30. Call (905) 884-7933.

### Unsolved crash recreated

York Regional Police returned to the scene of an unsolved hit and run last Friday night in a bid to find the driver who killed a pedestrian two years ago.

Police were stopping vehicles on Hwy. 27 south of Rutherford Road, hoping to speak with someone who may remember a helpful detail surrounding the Feb. 11, 1998 hit and run.

"We recovered very little evidence from the scene at the time," Staff Sgt. Al Ledger said. Francesco Decicco, 62, of Brampton, was walking south on Hwy. 27 at about 8 p.m. after his car had broken down when he was struck.

Anyone with information should contact Const. Dave Mitchell at 881-1221, ext. 7703.

### Board studies mileage hike

A year after they were supposed to examine the issue, public school board trustees are to decide in March whether to give themselves a hike in their mileage expenses.

Trustees and board employees get 30 cents for every kilometre they drive on board business.

Policy dictates officials are to examine issues such as mileage expenses every five years. Trustees last looked over their expenses six years ago.

Officials are to ask parents and students what they think about an increase.

## WOODBINE

### CHRYSLER JEEP

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