



You can help Lend money, voice to cause

If you want to help protect York Region's green-space, there are several organizations you can support.

• **Oak Ridges Moraine Foundation** is an arms-length government funded agency that offers money to projects that protect the moraine by supporting agriculture and tourism.

Some of its projects include tree planting initiatives and helping conservation authorities acquire greenspaces.

For information, call 905-833-5733 or visit ormf.com

• **Friends of the Greenbelt** will invest \$25 million in the greenbelt over five years.

It is accepting proposals for programs that support farming, promote rural communities and enhance the natural environment.

For example, it is looking for ways to connect farmers to markets for fresh local produce, explained Shelley Petrie.

One example is helping them tap into the growing market for organics.

Although demand for organic produce has grown exponentially in the past few years, only about 10 per cent of organics sold in Ontario markets comes from Ontario farms.

For information, call 416-960-0001 or visit our-greenbelt.ca

• **Save the Oak Ridges Moraine (STORM)** is a citizen group that was instrumental in getting legislation passed to protect the moraine. It continues to work at the local and regional levels to ensure planning decisions respect the environmental significance of the moraine and that take into account its ecological and hydrological functions.

Visit stormcoalition.org for information.

No end to fight to keep York green

BY SERENA WILLOUGHBY
Staff Writer

There's an act to protect the Oak Ridges Moraine, a plan to protect the Greenbelt and a strategy to focus new development in already built-up areas.

So the job of protecting environmentally sensitive lands is done, right?

Not even close, say the people who have been fighting to protect York Region's environment.

With the province requiring York Region to grow by 600,000 people by 2031, environmentalists such as Debbe Crandall of Save the Oak Ridges Moraine wonder if all those people will be content to move into highrises, or if they will continue to demand single-family homes.

Houses require land and land is getting scarce. A glance at the map shows the few areas that can still be developed encroach on the moraine.

More specifically, they are in the moraine's agricultural buffer, an area that has limited protection now but will come under review in 2021.

At that point, development could be permitted.

"Sustainability may not be possible with the numbers the province is putting down. We will not come to a sustainable solution based on the way we've done it in the past, Ms



In this comprehensive series discussing the region's burgeoning growth and how best to manage it, we will delve into the following topics:

March 16: Planning for growth

March 23: Economics of growth

TODAY: Growing green

April 6: Healthy communities

April 13: Livable lifestyles

April 20: Getting around

If you missed an earlier topic, check it out at www.yorkregion.com

Crandall said.

The province's own environmental commissioner, Gord Miller, also questions the strategy of pushing most of the population growth into the Greater Toronto Area.

"Even with higher development densities, this is a vast number of people settling in an already stressed

landscape," he said in his report last year.

New residents still need water, sewers, roads and power, he noted, wondering if natural heritage can survive.

For example, urban development around Lake Simcoe has led to increased phosphorus levels that have upset the lake's delicate ecosystem.

Currently more than 100 tonnes of phosphorus a year enters Lake Simcoe from stormwater runoff in urban areas, improper manure storage in rural areas, streambank and shoreline erosion, faulty septic systems and poor gardening and lawn care practices.

That has led to large-scale growth of weeds around the Georgina shoreline, a problem the town spends hundreds of thousands of dollars trying to fix through "weed harvesting".

A community group called WAVE runs a campaign to help homeowners minimize their impact on the lake, by not using chemical lawn fertilizer, for example.

From the debate over pesticide use to getting people to use public transit, protecting the region's environment is about how we choose to live.

"It's not a matter of telling people how to live. Are we aware of what we're doing or are we just blundering forward?" Mr. Miller said.

To that end, the region is holding a

series of forums this month on building sustainable communities. There will be meetings April 4 in Vaughan, April 6 in Georgina and April 12 at the regional headquarters in Newmarket to allow residents to air their ideas about how York should grow.

But Richmond Hill resident Carrie Hoffelner believes it's a little late.

Plans for the York Durham sewer system, better known as the Big Pipe, have already defined the direction municipal planning will take by making large-scale development possible in many rural parts of the region.

"We need to slow down and take a look at the path we're already on," she said, "It's misleading to say, 'Give us your input as to how you want to grow' when, in large part, that's already been decided."

But environmental protection can be improved by something as simple as ensuring parks include naturally preserved areas, as well as the sports fields and recreational areas that tend to be built in every subdivision, Mr. Miller said.

"I worry about that in York Region, I don't see a lot of natural places where kids can go and explore. I'm not talking about places you have to get in your car and drive to, but places right in their own neighborhood where kids can interact with nature. If they're there, kids will find their way there," he said.

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