

DAILY COMMERCIAL NEWS

AND CONSTRUCTION RECORD

August 18, 2008

Ontario's Growing the Greenbelt

New greenbelt criteria offer Ontario's construction industry greater certainty

VINCE VERSACE

staff writer

New criteria in Ontario's Growing the Greenbelt plan will benefit construction because it ensures practical, systemic growth, says the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario (RCCAO).

"The word 'certainty' is likely the best to use," Andy Manahan, executive director of the RCCAO. "The criteria makes sense and there are only a handful of municipalities looking at significant expansions."

The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing recently held meetings across Ontario to discuss potentially expanding the 1.8 million acre Greenbelt, an environmentally protected area. Concerns about not fully seeing the effects of the Greenbelt and how it interacts with other provincial growth policies were expressed by the RCCAO.

Manahan notes that the construction industry has had to already adjust to changes in its "business environment" caused by Places to Grow, amendments to the Planning Act and passage of both the Clean Water and Greenbelt acts. Places to Grow and the Greenbelt are the primary drivers of where growth will occur, he says.

"The relationship between them is important and we would like to see the infrastructure investment needed to input Places to Grow to start flowing," says Manahan.

The recently released Greenbelt criteria stresses that municipal requests to expand the Greenbelt will need to identify the relevancy of the relationship with other provincial initiatives and "not impede their planning or implementation."

Some of these provincial initiatives include water source protection plans under the Clean Water Act, Metrolinx's Regional Transportation Plan, the Ministry of Transportation's planning,

design and construction projects and the proposed Lake Simcoe Protection Strategy.

“We agree with the criteria that any request for expansion should not be something that comes up, out-of-the-blue, from an environment or special interest group,” says Manahan. “It has to be a resolution supported by a council.”

The Greenbelt includes about one million acres of protected land, known as the Protected Countryside, in addition to the land protected by the Niagara Escarpment Plan and the Oak Ridges Moraine Plan. It extends 325 kilometres from the eastern end of the Oak Ridges Moraine near Rice Lake, to the Niagara River in the west. The Greenbelt reaches 80 kms at its widest point from the mouth of the Rouge River to the northern tip of Durham Region.

The criteria also calls for one or more Greenbelt systems to be identified and linked in any proposed expansion and their functional relationship must be proven. This will help prevent isolated ‘Greenbelt islands’ which also were a concern to construction and development plans, adds Manahan.