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Development

Construction alliance cautions against plans to expand Ontario's greenbelt

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Ontario should not consider expanding its Greenbelt until it has lived and learned from it for a decade, says the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario.

"The Greenbelt Plan was introduced only three years ago and there has not been enough time to see and evaluate the impact of its restrictions," explains Andy Manahan, executive director, RCCAO.

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. The Greenbelt includes farmland and stretches around Lake Ontario and north towards Lake Simcoe. It also includes the Oak Ridges Moraine, Niagara Escarpment, and about 7,000 farms. The RCCAO spoke at one of the public meetings held in Markham recently.

"The Greenbelt Plan is not a plan in isolation, says Manahan. "The province's Places to Grow Plan is far from fully implemented and both these pieces complement each other."

The construction industry has had to adjust to changes in the "business environment" caused by Places to Grow, amendments to the Planning Act and passage of both the Clean Water and Greenbelt acts, adds Manahan.

"Both the Greenbelt and Places to Grow direct where the bulk of growth should happen in Ontario," says Manahan. "However, we have not seen a lot of the core infrastructure, such as roads, sewer and bridges, be put in place to help meet Places to Grow."

The RCCAO supported the establishment of the original Greenbelt and it has always continued to monitor implementation issues concerning it.

It endorses the principle of protecting the countryside and concentrating a significant portion of growth within the existing urban area of the Greater Golden Horseshoe.

“We think waiting for the 10-year review of the plan in 2015 would be best. However, if they do wish to expand before that, we hope they do not make a new Greenbelt area an isolated island,” explains Manahan.

There is a provision in the Greenbelt Plan for expansions before the 10-year review period but Manahan and the RCCAO believe none of the following expansion conditions are met:

- There are major unforeseen circumstances, or major new provincial policy, legislation or regulation that create the need for an amendment
- The overall effectiveness and integrity of the Greenbelt Plan would be threatened if the amendment were deferred to the next 10-year review
- The effectiveness and/or relevance of the Plan’s policies would be improved through an amendment.