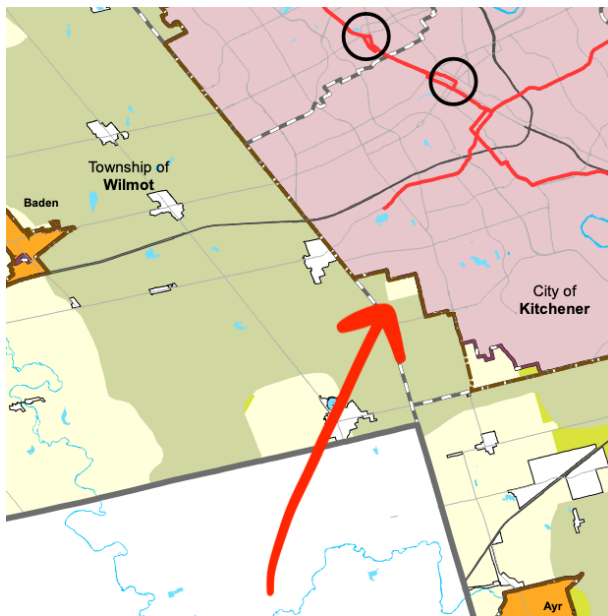


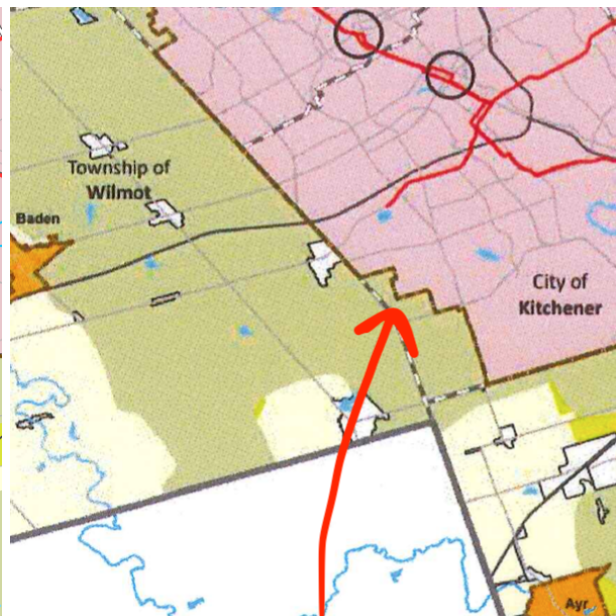
# Ontario forces massive sprawl on Waterloo Region, breaches Countryside Line

Hold The Line statement on Regional Official Plan decision, Bill 97, and changes to Provincial Policy Statement.

April 18, 2023



*Region of Waterloo approved Countryside Line*



*Provincially-imposed amendment extending the Countryside Line*

**HALDIMAND TRACT, TRADITIONAL TERRITORY OF THE CHONNONTON, ANISHINAABE, AND HAUDENOSAUNEE PEOPLES** — Waterloo Region's drinking water supply is under threat, as Ontario has approved urban expansion past the Countryside Line and into the Waterloo Moraine. The moraine, deposited by glaciers at the end of the last ice age, filters our drinking water into clean underground aquifers that Waterloo Region residents rely on to survive.

This unnecessary and dangerous move could represent the tip of the spear for more breaches of the Countryside Line, and threatens to upend the balance of urban and rural areas in our region.

With smart planning, the land within our Countryside Line boundary should last us hundreds of years while welcoming a growing, thriving population in our cities and villages. Instead, Ontario

has run roughshod over our local leadership and forced us to plan for growth where it doesn't make any sense.

We know that we have the ability to create complete communities without tearing up our countryside. By building on the 3,734 hectares of greenfield land that were already set aside in the 2015 plan, we could welcome over 270,000 new neighbours. These new communities could be dense enough to support transit service from day one. Even more new residents would be accommodated within the existing built-up area, through infill and redevelopment. And we wouldn't have to touch any rural or agricultural land beyond the existing urban boundary.

Ultimately, the Region of Waterloo approved a plan with a modest expansion of greenfield area. This plan had support from a broad cross-section of First Nations, community groups, farmers, and real estate developers.

Now, the Province has decided to override that plan without regard for local decisionmaking, and without any recourse to appeal. It has forced an additional 2,208 hectares of land, over and above the 3,734 hectares of greenfield area we already have. And it has decided to push some of that extra land past the Countryside Line.

We are shocked and enraged. For twenty years, our Countryside Line has been a hard boundary that protects Waterloo Region's groundwater, farmland, and natural areas for generations to come. With a stroke of the pen, the Province has begun to unravel decades of responsible local planning.

This will not help create more housing, nor will it help with affordability. These lands are out at the edge of the countryside, with no infrastructure to service them. It would be ridiculous to build in these areas before we have used up the vacant land in our existing urban boundary.

Aside from forcing sprawl in Waterloo Region, there are other Provincial policies announced recently which give us concern:

Bill 97, which is [open for comments until May 6](#), would make the following changes:

- Expand the Province's ability to issue Minister's Zoning Orders (MZOs), which can unilaterally override local council decisions.
- Let the Province override demolition control and rental replacement. This puts our new policies to protect affordable rentals in jeopardy. While the province didn't explicitly remove them from our Official Plan, Bill 97 would let them override our policies at any time.
- Lets the Province force development agreements between landowners and municipalities to extend infrastructure out to a new development.

The Province is also planning for a new Provincial Policy Statement, which is [open for comments until June 5](#). It would make the following changes:

- Allow farmland to be split up into residential lots, even outside of a designated urban area or settlement area.

- Allow an expansion of rural settlement areas at any time — not just during the 5-year review. What's more, municipalities do not need to show that there is a need for the expansion.
- Changes the definition of “affordable” from an income-based measure to a market-based measure. This is a bizarre and out-of-touch way to measure affordability in an uncertain housing market where prices continue to overshoot growth in incomes. This puts the Region's Affordable Housing Target in jeopardy, which is defined as the lower of an income-based or a market-based calculation. This definition is incredibly important for ensuring true affordability in our community.
- Make it easier to do open new mining operations and gravel pits in rural areas
- Unspecified changes to policies related to “Natural heritage”, which haven't been released yet.

Waterloo Region has shown that we can build lots of housing fast, exceeding our housing targets and planning for even more. We don't need to sacrifice the countryside or expand our urban boundary to do that.

Minister Clark and Premier Ford have consistently ignored calls for meaningful action that would create housing and improve affordability without paving over farms, forests, and drinking water reservoirs.

We must also keep in mind the ongoing litigation between Six Nations of The Grand River, Haudenosaunee Confederacy, and the Federal and Provincial Governments. If more land in the Haldimand Tract is slated to be paved over against the wishes of First Nations, it could affect the total compensation to be paid by the province.

The Province continues to show disrespect for local planning, affordability measures, and our beloved Countryside Line. We urge Waterloo Region municipalities to use all the tools at their disposal to resist these changes. We call on residents to submit comments on the Province's planned changes to Bill 97 and Provincial Policy Statement.

Hold The Line will continue to organize with our members and allies to respond to this egregious overreach by the Province.

— *Hold The Line Waterloo Region*

Media contact: [connect@holdthelinewr.org](mailto:connect@holdthelinewr.org)