

Presentation to Waterloo Region Planning & Works Committee  
February 23, 2016  
Provincial 10 Year Greenbelt Review and the  
David Crombie Advisory Panel Report

Honourable Mayors, Councillors, and Guests,

*Slide #1 - Title Slide*

My name is Kevin Thomason and I am the owner of 1115 Cedar Grove Road, in Wilmot, in the Laurel Creek Headwaters ESL. I am presenting today in my capacity as Vice-Chair of the Grand River Environmental Network to inform this committee of citizen interest in expanding the Provincial Greenbelt into Waterloo Region.

The recent Greenbelt Review offers an opportunity to reinforce the protections, which have been put into place with the new Waterloo Regional Official Plan. The time frame for action might be short, and it is our position that Regional Council should take an active role in ensuring our inclusion in the Greenbelt.

Waterloo Region has asked to be included in the Greenbelt before.

*Slide #2 – Quote from Chair Ken Seiling*

Back in February, 2005 both myself and Regional Officials independently appeared before the Provincial Standing Committee at Queen’s Park, asking for inclusion in the Provincial Greenbelt Act. To quote Chair Seiling’s presentation:

“The Region of Waterloo is strongly supportive of the Draft Greenbelt Plan. As noted in our previous submissions to the province, many of the Greenbelt Plan’s policies such as strong protection for prime agricultural areas, firm settlement area boundaries, and the protection of water resources are core principles of our own

ROPP and RGMS... the Region of Waterloo recommends that the Greenbelt Protection Plan, be extended to include environmentally sensitive and agricultural lands in the Region of Waterloo. It is a good plan for communities in the Greater Toronto-Hamilton area and it would be an equally good plan for communities in the Outer Ring.”

*Slide #3 – Balancing Health and Protection*

Despite these presentations and numerous requests for inclusion in the Provincial Greenbelt, Waterloo Region was not included in the Greenbelt and received none of the balancing environmental protections given to other rapidly-growing GTA municipalities in the 2004 Greenbelt Act.

*Slide #4 – Westward Expansion of Greenbelt Map*

*Slide #5 – Closeup of Expansion Area*

Premier Dalton McGuinty promised that areas left out of the Greenbelt would be given the required enabling legislation to permit them to develop their own protection tools to balance growth and protect local natural heritage.

*Slide #6 – Waterloo Not Included in the Provincial Greenbelt*

Thus, for the past decade the Region of Waterloo has created numerous tools and pioneered concepts to protect our environmentally sensitive landscapes, source-water areas, significant valleylands, and agricultural areas. Hundreds, perhaps thousands of citizens have been involved in the creation of our ESL's, Protected Countryside, Countryside Line Concept, Rapid Transit, Regional Official Plan, and other efforts to protect our resources and guide growth.

Our Region has succeeded developing these home-grown, Greenbelt-like solutions and has become even more renown as a pioneer and leader. So many of our concepts and precedents developed here, are now being implemented elsewhere.

*Slide #7 – Waterloo Countryside Photo*

It was our earlier ROP and RGMS that helped the Province with the Greenbelt Act. Personally, our experiences with ESL's lead to me helping in Macedonia, Germany, Austria, the Czech Republic, and other European nations on the European Greenbelt – an incredible natural corridor 15,000 kilometers long spanning 26 countries.

However successful our local innovations though, these are only local Regional level protections, that can be easily overturned by future local governments. All it would take is one rogue Council to potentially undo decades of efforts and visionary planning. Unfortunately, one can find many examples of rogue politicians and hijacked councils these days.

Throughout all these efforts at developing our own local protections, it was expected that eventually the Provincial Greenbelt would be expanded to Waterloo. Our local solutions contemplated and may even count on Greenbelt expansion.

Even as recently as this past May, in a report to this Council, Regional Staff stated “we continue to support the policies of the Growth Plan and the Greenbelt Plan... We encourage the Province to maintain the overall policy directions of the Plans, to address the challenges of planning for growth in the Greater Golden Horseshoe and the Region of Waterloo”.

Premier Kathleen Wynne charged former Toronto Mayor David Crombie to lead the 10 Year Integrated Growth Plan and Greenbelt Review panel, and this past autumn they saw the largest attendance ever seen in a series of public town hall meetings across the province, along with thousands of formal written submissions.

It turns out that the Greenbelt is the second-most popular provincial initiative in the past ten years after all-day kindergarten, with 86% of Ontarians strongly supporting the Greenbelt. This shouldn't be a surprise though as daily in the news we see the

public urging the government to do more on climate change, asking for more water protection, looking for increased resilience, more local food, and more protection of farmland as well as our remaining green spaces.

A recent Environics poll found that 9 out of 10 people in Ontario want to grow the Greenbelt, and not surprisingly this was one of the primary recommendations of Crombie Review Panel, whose final report in December stated the Greenbelt is successfully meeting its objectives, stated the need to expand on its success, and listed a total of 87 Recommendations for the Provincial Growth and Greenbelt Plans.

The Premier and several cabinet ministers that I have met with recently emphasized that they are going to be moving quickly on these Crombie Panel recommendations.

If we don't want to be overlooked again for Greenbelt expansion, we need to be moving quickly as well. We need the same protections as other Ontario municipalities, and certainly the public is asking for greater action on climate change and the environment.

Our local solutions developed over the past ten years, are working well but not as well as both the Greenbelt and our ROP working in conjunction could. To quote Chair Seiling's 2004 Queens Park presentation, "We just think that being put in the Greenbelt plan gives us one more level of security."

*Slide # 8 – Blue Belt – Greenbelt 2.0 – Protecting Vulnerable Water Supplies*

A Greenbelt expansion could overlay the existing Protected Countryside designation in the Regional Official Plan – it would help to reinforce our Countryside Line, protect our rural townships, and connect our ESL's to the rest of the province forming a natural corridor hundreds of kilometers long. The mapping and policies are already done and little would change on the ground for landowners since our ROP has already been in place since last June's settlement.

*Slide #9 – Close-up of Greenbelt 2.0 in Waterloo*

Joining the Greenbelt is a winning scenario. It could become part of our heritage, something to be proud of, and a legacy for our children. Much like Algonquin Park, its concept becomes a national treasure that helps to form our identity.

And there is little downside. There is no increased bureaucracy with the Greenbelt, there is no office of approvals, or governing body. Unlike in 2004, many developers agree with the Crombie recommendations, and the farming community too has come out in support of the recommendations to help prevent the loss of farmland, increase opportunities for local food as well as specialty crops, and support farmers markets – recognizing that the number of farmers markets in the Greenbelt has doubled in the past decade.

*Slide #10 – Quotes from OHBA and OFA*

Regional Staff has already made some excellent suggestions last Spring at the onset of the Crombie review. Though to the best of our knowledge there has been no response yet to the Crombie Recommendations since they came out in December.

We realize that we need to be prudent and there are still questions. We understand that our ROP isn't totally complete as parts of the SouthWest Corner of Kitchener are still awaiting further studies. However, this area doesn't need to be decided at this point. It would be foolish to risk protection of 120,000 acres, and not see Greenbelt benefits for our entire Region, over a few parcels of land in Kitchener.

*Slide #11 – Ten Year Greenbelt Review*

We can wait to see if Waterloo happens to be included in any proposed amendments expected this Spring, or we can reach out to the province now, and work proactively

to ensure that we are part of the discussions, part of formulating the plan, and potentially included in the amendments.

We missed out in 2004 despite significant last minute efforts and appeals to be included in the Greenbelt. We have spent the decade since developing our own solutions and battling for our visionary ROP. These coming weeks could be our only chance for Greenbelt expansion, and the reinforcement of our Regional Official Plan for quite some time – perhaps even for a generation according to some.

Most Waterloo citizens will never read the Regional Official Plan or understand the intricacies of planning details. Almost everyone though understands a Greenbelt and immediately recognizes the benefits for society.

Please ensure that we are doing everything that we can to be part of the conversation, and that we work to see the Provincial Greenbelt finally extended to Waterloo, so we can enjoy the same protections and programs that benefit others in Ontario.

The public understands Greenbelts and wants to see more action by government. Please speak up now so that future generations will have at least the same, or perhaps an even better quality of life than we enjoy today.

*Slide #12 – Questions?*

Thank you.

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