

For Immediate Release January 25, 2007

## Durham Council Backs Down from Greenbelt Fight

### Decision leaves Greenbelt challenge on record

Toronto – The Ontario Greenbelt Alliance welcomes the Durham Council decision to drop the identification of five parcels of environmentally sensitive land for a future growth study. The Council was set to add the properties as an Attachment to its Official Plan.

By unrecorded vote, Durham Council voted 23 to 1 yesterday to leave undisturbed the May 10, 2006 Motion of Council to challenge the Greenbelt boundary at the first review of the Greenbelt Act in 2015. The surprise decision rejected a recent recommendation from the Durham Planning Committee to attach Council's previous resolution to target these lands for future development in the Official Plan.

In effect, a large swath of environmentally sensitive land in the Duffins-Rouge Agricultural Preserve, North Courtice, North Whitby and Ajax are no longer targeted for future growth.

“Durham Council's decision signals a new, greener vision in Durham Region – one that respects the Greenbelt boundaries and protects our green spaces, farmland and natural areas,” said Dr. Rick Smith, Executive Director, Environmental Defence, a member group of the Ontario Greenbelt Alliance. The lands in question comprise 2,192 hectares (5,400 acres) of existing rural and agricultural areas. Durham's own Official Plan acknowledges that none of this land is needed for future growth until 2021 at the earliest. The area is roughly seven times greater than the Toronto Islands. A very small number of developers would have benefited from the potential changes to the Greenbelt boundary. Many delegates attending the Council meeting indicated they would prefer to see Durham Council's original resolution to challenge the Greenbelt boundary in 2015 rescinded; however, most said they would be satisfied with the compromise that there be no attachment to the Official Plan and the issue would not be revisited until a Greenbelt review in 2015.

Councillors who had previously voted in favour of shrinking the Greenbelt were challenged to report campaign donations from landowners benefiting from the re-designation. Councillors were also unable to defend the decision to earmark these parcels of land using appropriate planning rationale or staff reports. “Durham Council's attempt to undermine the wildly popular Greenbelt hit a political cul-de-sac,” said David Donnelly, legal counsel to Environmental Defence. “After months of railing against the ‘Toronto media’, criticizing their own constituents and claiming they needed more studies, a large number of

Councillors changed their vote after realizing that fighting the Greenbelt is a dead-end street.”

During the meeting, Councillor Marilyn Pearce, Mayor of Scugog, said “we want to send the message that this Council supports the Greenbelt”.

“This is a very positive step for Durham Region because it shows its commitment to not only its citizens, but to all residents of southern Ontario in terms of safeguarding our collective food security for many years to come,” said Nathan Fahey, Acting Executive Director of the STORM Coalition (Save the Oak Ridges Moraine), a member group of the Ontario Greenbelt Alliance.

About the Ontario Greenbelt Alliance: The Ontario Greenbelt Alliance is a diverse multi-stakeholder coalition of over 75 organizations who share a common vision for protecting and expanding Ontario’s Golden Horseshoe Greenbelt.

[www.greenbelt.ca](http://www.greenbelt.ca).