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Developer denies ties to controversial Markham ad

January 20, 2010

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Eyebrows have been raised over the source of a recent full-page ad in a Markham newspaper warning about the dangers of unbridled intensification as the city considers a bold proposal for a permanent food belt.

The plan would prevent development in a 2,000-hectare agricultural zone within the city and allow intensification along major corridors and specific areas.

When Tom Farrar, the man who said he paid for the ad, accidentally emailed a proof, it was revealed the client for the ad's design was TACC Construction Ltd.

The construction company, several people who saw the email pointed out to the *Star*, is owned by developer Silvio DeGasperi, one of a number of landowners who have speculated on land inside the zone where the proposed food belt could be located.

Asked to explain why TACC's name appears on the proof for the ad, Ken Rovinelli, a land development consultant with TACC, said it was an unfortunate mistake.

"We are not paying for designing or running the advertisement in question," Rovinelli said.

TACC, he explained, knows Farrar as head of the Box Grove Residents Association in the city's east end, where the company is involved in a residential and employment project.

All TACC did, Rovinelli said, was refer its design firm to Farrar when he asked the developer to recommend a designer.

One of the designers with PM Design, he said, had "mistakenly started the file with a TACC tag as they do when undertaking our Box Grove work."

"This miscue has been corrected," said Rovinelli.

Farrar, a local management consultant who said he came up with the phrase "Stop the Apartment Belt" to counter the food belt proposal, said he is concerned a Jane-Finch style corridor of apartment buildings could spring up if development is restricted to within the city boundaries.

"I just don't like the way they are being planned," said Farrar, adding he didn't mind gated communities.

Councillor Erin Shapero, who along with Councillor Valerie Burke is spearheading the food belt plan, called the ad "fear mongering."

They say thoughtful intensification along major nodes, and corridors – as is being proposed in many other GTA cities – and the food belt proposal are necessary to curb sprawl and create densities that support public transit.

They also challenge a claim in the ad, that without a boundary expansion all new residents would be housed in apartment buildings, because Markham still has land for traditional low-density housing.

The financial stakes in Markham, where land is expensive, are huge. The skyrocketing value of land is best illustrated by the recent sale of the 83-hectare Beckett farm, at 16th Ave. and Kennedy Rd. It lies within the urban boundary, is already marked for development and was sold last month for \$100 million. It was purchased by a partnership of developers Arista Homes, Fieldgate Homes, Paradise Homes and Starlane Homes, said Rovinelli, a spokesman for the group at the time.