

TOWN HALL MEETING A HUGE SUCCESS

“You [Land Over Landings] are fighting one of the great campaigns in Ontario land-protection history and I wish you every success in stopping this mindless, unnecessary, and costly airport.” So said environmental lawyer David Donnelly, a panelist at the “Ontario’s Greenbelt Under Threat” town hall on January 28 in Brougham.



Photo by Ken Mulveney

It was a great evening of presentations, questions, answers, discussion, and networking. Brougham Hall was packed to the back, and the messages about the importance of preserving and strengthening the Greenbelt and Moraine legislation were powerful and unequivocal.

Moderator Steve Parish, Mayor of Ajax, told the crowd: “If you don’t tell your neighbours, friends, politicians that you love the Greenbelt, it will not be a priority. Misinformation is the flip side of that coin: you saw in the *Globe and Mail* recently that we’re running out of land for development in Ontario? *That’s not true.*”

We heard from David Donnelly that much of the protective legislation is already in place but needs strengthening or has yet to be acted upon. Debbe Crandall, Save the Oak Ridges Moraine Coalition, talked about the need for better planning outside as well as within the conservation plan areas, and the need for the next generation to become engaged, to ensure that the protections are made permanent. Ian McLaurin, Ontario Soil Regulation Task Force, described the escalating “dirty dirt” crisis, in which thousands of truckloads of untested, sometimes contaminated dirt from Toronto construction sites such as downtown condo towers and the Pan Am Games, are being dumped on the Greenbelt.

BEWARE OF MYTHS!

So a nameless editorialist in *Maclean’s* thinks that, as our planet warms, the Greenbelt can be rolled north until we’re grazing cattle on the tundra, while the space left behind can be filled with subdivisions, making urban housing more affordable. And Konrad Yakabuski writes in the *Globe and Mail* that agricultural land isn’t scarce in Southern Ontario (no proof cited) and that anti-sprawl policies make for unaffordable cities. Kenneth P. Green (really) of the Fraser Institute weighs in with the spurious claim that the Greenbelt’s boundaries are “arbitrary,” and that the Greenbelt places “harsh limits on growth,” causing – surprise! – unaffordable city housing. Bogus grievances.

Remember the pit-bull news blitz? For a selected batch of scribes, today’s pit bull is the Greenbelt, ruining the lives of city-dwellers and farmers alike, driving up housing prices, lowering rural property values, reducing carbon emissions at too great a cost. There *are* problems to be fixed, but more sprawl isn’t the answer. There’s more than a whiff of “campaign” here, clearly orchestrated to coincide with the Greenbelt Review.

If the anti-Greenbelt forces had their way the result would be sprawl to the horizon. The kind that makes your heart sink when you go for a weekend drive in the country and can find no country there. Only one of those “pundits” even mentioned food. Yet that’s much of what the Greenbelt Act is about, wisely preserving our best near-urban farmland for our present and future food needs. So think about what’s behind this sudden spate of articles, then join us in demanding the permanent protection of our life-sustaining Greenbelt.



Panelists David Donnelly, Debbe Crandall, Ian McLaurin, Mary Delaney, and Faisal Moola answer questions from the floor. Photo by Alexis Edghill Whalen.

Our chair, Mary Delaney, outlined why no airport, big or small, is needed in Pickering, and added: “It’s becoming obvious in this embattled century, defined by the threat of global climate change, that a new airport – *if* ever needed – should never be built on our finest farmland. ‘Economic development’ doesn’t need Class 1 farmland. Farmers do. If Class 1 soil is degraded or destroyed by non-farming uses, it’s gone. And so is another food source. With 80 million more mouths to feed *each year* on this planet, protecting farmland has become essential.”

Faisal Moola, David Suzuki Foundation, quoted Coretta Scott King, wife of Martin Luther King, on how the struggle against injustice is neverending, and is fought and won with every generation. “And there’s no question about it. You stopped this airport 40 years ago and with people power you’re going to stop this airport again. And I am so happy that the David Suzuki Foundation and other environmental groups can stand with you in terms of protecting prime farmland and nature.

“As biological creatures, we depend on nature and prime farmland to sustain us, but they are taken for granted by policymakers.” Yet, he added, the Melancthon Mega Quarry fight was won. And the Food & Water First campaign “is taking off like wildfire across the province, to enshrine that core principle – food and water first – in policy. I’ve met with the Premier on this, I’ve met with members of the legislature on this, and I can tell you, it has traction with our government leaders and our policymakers. If anything was proven from the fight to stop the Mega Quarry, it’s that people power does work.”

Mayor Parish echoed those words: “People underestimate that fact. They think ‘my vote doesn’t matter, nobody listens to me.’ WRONG! And if you think that way you will perpetuate that. There is a real opportunity ... to have really good, positive input to this important [Greenbelt and Moraine] legislation, and your presence here tonight shows that you care....”

We hope to have videoclips of the event posted soon.

ONTARIO FARMLAND TRUST

We’re on the panel of the OFT’s annual Farmland Forum, Mar. 27, in Oshawa! The focus will be on issues important to the GTA East: the future of farming on the Federal Lands and in the Rouge National Urban Park (RNUP), and farmland loss to sprawl.

Along with Faisal Moola (David Suzuki Foundation) and others, Land Over Landings will be discussing tools for communicating the importance of farmland preservation. Other topics:

- Creating policy for vibrant local food economies
 - The RNUP vision for near-urban agriculture
 - California’s development-offsetting approaches for protecting farmland
 - Pennsylvania’s protection of 500,000 acres of farmland.
- Earlybird tickets are available now** at: <http://ontariofarmlandtrust.ca/>

Come and help shape the future of farmland protection in Ontario!

Food for Thought

Here in Ontario we did two visionary things by protecting the Moraine and creating the Greenbelt. [...]

The year our farmland was expropriated for a Pickering airport, another visionary wrote a song called “Imagine.” That’s what we do when we envision the busy, productive, revenue-generating food hub these “airport lands” could be again. To paraphrase John Lennon, can’t we just “give peas a chance?”

~ Mary Delaney, “Greenbelt Under Threat”

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