



NIAGARA REGION'S GREENBELT PLAN REVIEW

Summary Report

August 2013

URBAN
STRATEGIES
INC .



Thank you!

This document could not have been possible without the guidance of the Niagara Greenbelt Review Working Group, the contributions of the many stakeholders and members of the public who participated in the process, and the support of the Project Team at Niagara Region.

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Farm on Thirty Road, West Lincoln

Executive Summary

In anticipation of the Provincial review of the Greenbelt Plan in 2015, Niagara Region has undertaken a comprehensive consultation process to develop a Niagara perspective on the range of benefits, challenges, and opportunities related to Greenbelt implementation in Niagara. The feedback from this process has been summarized in this report, which will be submitted to the Province of Ontario in advance of the 2015 Provincial Review of the Greenbelt Plan.

The Process

The Niagara Greenbelt Plan Review process involved a robust community consultation program that engaged a broad range of Regional stakeholders and members of the public. Between February and April 2013, two rounds of consultation were held, bringing together the perspectives of a range of interests including agriculture, environment and natural heritage, planning, development, recreation and tourism, culture, and economic development, as well as perspectives from elected officials. The goal was to understand the benefits and challenges associated with the Greenbelt Plan and to identify future opportunities to improve the Plan and inform the 2015 Provincial review.

The Summary Report

This Summary Report compiles the views, thoughts, and perspectives regarding the Greenbelt Plan that were expressed during the Niagara Greenbelt Plan Review process. It is a summary of what the consultant team heard during the consultation program and is intended to capture a Niagara perspective on the Greenbelt Plan, what is working, and where change is needed in the Plan to better meet the priorities and address the distinct character of Niagara. In some cases, opposite perspectives were expressed by different interests, both of which are presented in the report.

The report is organized into the following five broad sections: Greenbelt Plan Benefits, Greenbelt Plan Obstacles and Challenges, Opportunities for Change, Greatest Opportunities to Effect Change, and Next Steps. In each of the first three sections an overview of common messages is provided along with a more detailed bulleted list of “what we heard.” The Opportunities for Change section goes on to describe proposed changes to the Greenbelt Plan, its implementation, and related policies, initiatives and programs that were mentioned in the course of the consultation.

Key Messages

Greenbelt Plan Benefits

During the consultation, participants were encouraged to share their perspectives on the benefits of the Greenbelt Plan. Though many participants did not see any benefits of the Greenbelt, others had a more mixed perspective and a number of Greenbelt Plan benefits did emerge. The following key benefits were expressed:

- Protects greenspace and is a symbol of green space protection
- Improves management of growth and development by:
 - Providing policy support to limit outward growth and delineating where growth should not take place
 - Supporting infill and higher density development
- Increases interest in brownfield development
- Increases awareness of issues affecting rural and agricultural communities
- Increases public support for farmers markets and local food initiatives
- Increases tourism and economic development opportunities in Greenbelt communities

Greenbelt Plan Obstacles and Challenges

The majority of feedback received during the consultation was regarding the obstacles and challenges posed by the Greenbelt Plan. Within the agricultural community there is a strong and emotional opposition to the Greenbelt. The feedback on obstacles and challenges from Round One of the consultation was organized into nine themes, which were presented back to participants in Round Two and subsequently refined. The nine themes are as follows:

- Failure to address agricultural viability
- Lack of flexibility in policy and application
- Conflict between Greenbelt Plan objectives
- Lack of Transparency in Plan development/ implementation and the 2015 review process
- Concerns with Greenbelt Plan boundary and natural heritage and hydrologic system mapping
- Lack of awareness by the public and the Province of the realities of farming
- Too many layers and lack of coordination
- Inequity and lack of fairness
- Impact on the type and focus of regional growth

Opportunities for Change

The second round of consultation asked participants to move beyond the obstacles and challenges associated with the Greenbelt Plan and focus on ways that the Plan can be improved or refined to meet their needs more effectively. Suggestions from Round One were grouped into five topic areas, which were refined and reorganized based on feedback from Round Two into the following six themes:

- Make the Plan/2015 review process transparent and collaborative
- Introduce agricultural viability as a key objective
- Provide for complete communities
- Ensure a streamlined process with greater flexibility in place-specific application
- Enhance education and awareness about the distinct nature of Niagara and its contribution within the Greenbelt
- Establish an improved process for determining boundaries

Greatest Opportunities for Effecting Change

Niagara's Greenbelt Plan Review process has provided a wealth of input on the community's experience with the Greenbelt to date. Participants were passionate, concerned and committed to expressing their opinions and suggestions for change to the Greenbelt Plan. Based on the emphasis in the community comments and a strategic assessment of opportunities that may have the best chance for effecting changes meaningful for Niagara in the Provincial Greenbelt Plan review, Urban Strategies has identified ten greatest opportunities for effecting change to the Greenbelt Plan through the review process. Our team recommends that Niagara Region consider the following ten opportunities for change as priorities in discussions and submissions to the Province during the Greenbelt review. Below is a high level summary of the recommendations. To review the recommendations in more detail, please refer to Section 7 of the Summary Report. The brackets contain reference numbers that relate to the Proposed Changes identified in Section 6.

- 1. Use the key outcomes from Niagara's Greenbelt Review process as the foundation and basis for immediate discussion between Niagara Region and the Province.** (6.1.6)
- 2. Recognizing that the microclimate and soil conditions create an irreplaceable resource in Niagara, prioritize agricultural viability as an objective over other Greenbelt objectives for lands within the Niagara Peninsula Tender Fruit and Grape Area.** (6.2.1)
- 3. Recognizing the distinct character of the agriculture industry and farming community in Niagara, provide for greater flexibility in application of Greenbelt policies.** More specifically, define the parameters within which, in order to support agricultural viability and complete urban and rural communities, regional municipalities would be allowed to interpret certain Greenbelt policies to ensure locally appropriate application. (6.1.5, 6.3.1, 6.3.2, 6.3.3, 6.4.5)
- 4. Recognizing the distinct nature of farming in the Tender Fruit and Grape Area, including the small farm parcel sizes and layout of the farming irrigation system, modify the definition of key hydrologic feature to distinguish between man-made and naturally formed features and utilize Niagara Region's Watercourse Mapping Update to determine appropriate setback provisions from key hydrologic features on agricultural lands within the Greenbelt.** (6.2.2)
- 5. Clarify and strengthen Greenbelt Plan policy language** to better articulate or define: the important role of farmers in the Greenbelt, the diversity of agriculture in Ontario, including differences in commodity sectors, farm practices and farm sizes, the environmental contribution of farmed lands, including the wildlife corridors and habitat provided by permanently cropped land, value-added farming policies, and definitions which conflict with other Provincial policies. (6.2.4, 6.4.1, 6.5.1)
- 6. Introduce greater transparency in the Greenbelt Act and Plan implementation by creating a Greenbelt ombudsman role or body that is accessible to municipalities and the broader community.** (6.1.3, 6.1.4, 6.5.2)

7. **The 2015 Provincial Greenbelt Plan review needs to be transparent, informed, diligent and genuinely open to exploring ways the Plan can be improved to better meet its objectives.** (6.1.1)
8. **Reintroduce ongoing and integrated inter-ministerial working teams to focus on Greenbelt implementation and to increase coordination between ministries on Greenbelt-related initiatives, policies and interpretation.** (6.2.3, 6.4.2, 6.5.4)
9. **Signal Provincial commitment to the Greenbelt by introducing a range of financial incentives, coordinated policy directions and tools that would provide support to Greenbelt stakeholders, farmers and the agricultural industry.** (6.2.3, 6.2.4, 6.2.5, 6.2.6)
10. **Ensure clarity in the process by which Greenbelt boundaries will be refined in the 2015 Provincial Greenbelt Plan review.** More specifically, articulate parameters by which boundary refinements may be considered, for example to support complete communities, optimize existing infrastructure, provide

community services, or acknowledge on the ground conditions in Niagara while not compromising the Greenbelt land base or objectives. (6.1.1, 6.6.1)

1 Niagara's Greenbelt Plan Review

In anticipation of the Provincial review of the Greenbelt Plan in 2015, Niagara Region has undertaken a comprehensive consultation process to develop a Niagara perspective on the range of benefits, challenges and opportunities related to Greenbelt implementation in Niagara. The feedback from this process has been summarized in this report, which will be submitted to the Province of Ontario in advance of the 2015 Provincial review of the Greenbelt Plan.

The Greenbelt Plan (2005) identifies where urbanization should not occur in order to provide permanent protection to the agricultural land base and the ecological features and functions occurring on this landscape. The Greenbelt Plan also protects natural connections between lakes and the Oak Ridges Moraine and the Niagara Escarpment. The primary objectives of the Greenbelt Plan are:

- Support agricultural land and promote the agriculture industry
- Protect natural heritage systems
- Create opportunities for culture, recreation and tourism
- Provide for viable rural communities
- Promote sustainable infrastructure and natural resource practices

The Greenbelt Act requires the Province of Ontario to undertake a review of the Greenbelt Plan every 10 years to consider revisions to current policies.

The Niagara Greenbelt Plan Review process involved a robust community consultation program that engaged a broad range of Regional stakeholders and members of the public between February and April 2013. The consultation process brought together the perspectives of a range of interests including agriculture, natural heritage, planning, development, recreation and tourism, culture, and economic development, as well as perspectives from elected officials. The goal of the consultation program was to understand the benefits and challenges associated with the Greenbelt Plan, as well as opportunities to improve its performance. This consultation process gives Niagara Region a comprehensive understanding of how the Greenbelt Plan is working in Niagara, allowing it to present a well-informed position to the Province as part of the 2015 review.



Opportunities for Change

2 About the Public Consultation Process

Niagara Region's Greenbelt Plan Review consultation process was undertaken in two rounds to ensure ample opportunities for the community to provide initial input and to respond to emerging directions. In addition, the Project Team has benefitted and been guided by a Niagara Greenbelt Review Working Group comprised of Regional, local municipal and agency staff and Niagara representatives of the agricultural community and development industry.

Community Consultation Round One took place from February 25-28, 2013. The intent of Round One was threefold:

- To inform participants about Niagara Region's Greenbelt Plan Review;
- To invite participants to provide their local perspective on the Plan's impact and implementation; and
- To provide participants with an opportunity to present and share ideas on how the Greenbelt Plan can be improved to better meet Niagara's needs.

Community Consultation Round One involved meetings with elected officials, a diverse range of stakeholders, and the public to discuss Greenbelt Plan benefits, challenges, and areas for improvement. Focus group sessions brought

together individuals with interests in the following broad topic areas: agriculture, economic development, planning, environment and natural heritage, and development. Two focus group sessions were devoted to agriculture to provide morning and evening options due to the level of interest in this topic. On average, approximately six individuals participated in each of the focus groups, with the exception of the agricultural focus groups, which had approximately 50 attendees at the evening session and 18 attendees at the morning session.

The consultant team also conducted interviews with Mayors, and in some cases Councillors, from the municipalities of Pelham, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Thorold, Lincoln and Grimsby. Finally, an evening public consultation session was held at Balls Falls Conservation Area.

At each consultation event, participants were provided with a "workbook" containing information about the consultation and the following five questions:

- In what ways do you think the Greenbelt Plan and policy directions have been beneficial?
- What current obstacles and challenges does the Plan pose to you?
- Are there specific examples that demonstrate your areas of concern?

- How can the Plan be improved or refined to better meet your needs?
- Are these obstacles and challenges unique to you or are they shared by other stakeholders in Niagara?

Participants were encouraged to complete the workbook at the session, or take it home and return it later. The same questions were also available in the form of an online survey on Niagara Region's project website.

Community Consultation Round Two took place from April 2-4, 2013. The intent of Round Two was:

- To ensure that feedback from Round One was captured accurately;
- To capture any perspectives that were missed in Round One; and
- To gather additional feedback around five "opportunities for change" identified in Round One.



Similar to Round One, Community Consultation Round Two involved meetings with elected officials, stakeholders, and the public. Four focus group sessions were held, this time mixing stakeholders representing different perspectives including agriculture, economic development, planning, aggregates, the environment, and development. Each focus group had between 12 and 19 participants. Interviews were conducted with Mayors, and in some cases Councillors, from Pelham, Niagara-on-the-Lake, St. Catharines, and Grimsby. An evening public consultation session drew 25 attendees.

At each consultation session participants were provided with a workbook containing information about the consultation process and a summary of the feedback that was received in Round One regarding Greenbelt Plan benefits, challenges, and opportunities for change. The workbooks provided space for participants to correct and/or add to the benefits and challenges, and then contained a series of questions designed to delve deeper into the five opportunities for change identified in Round One:

- Introduce agricultural viability as a key objective
- Provide for complete communities

- Establish a streamlined process with greater flexibility in place-specific application
- Enhance education and awareness
- Make the Plan/process more transparent and collaborative

Once again, participants were encouraged to complete the workbook at the session, or take it home and return it later. The workbook was also provided on the project website.

During both phases of the consultation process, several individuals and organizations submitted letters elaborating their position on the Greenbelt Plan. The project team also went on a site tour to visit some on the ground examples of locations that participants in Round One had mentioned as problematic and/or anomalous.

Well over 200 individuals representing a broad range of interests participated over the course of the two rounds of consultation.



Niagara-on-the-Lake

3 Purpose of this Document

This document compiles the views, thoughts, and perspectives regarding the Greenbelt Plan that were expressed during the consultation by various stakeholders, elected officials and the public. It is a summary of what the consultant team heard during the consultation program and is intended to capture a Niagara perspective on the Greenbelt Plan. In some cases, opposite perspectives were expressed by different interests, both of which are presented in the report.

The report is organized into the following five broad sections: Greenbelt Plan Benefits, Greenbelt Plan Obstacles and Challenges, Opportunities for Change, Greatest Opportunities to Effect Change and Next Steps. In each of the first three sections an overview of common messages is provided along with a more detailed bulleted list of “what we heard.” The Opportunities for Change section goes on to describe proposed changes to the Greenbelt Plan, its implementation, and related policies, initiatives and programs that were mentioned in the course of the consultation. In both the Obstacles and Challenges section and the Opportunities for Change section the consultant team has grouped related comments into a series of common themes. These themes emerged through Round One of the consultation and were validated by participants in Round Two.

A system of asterisks is used to reflect the emphasis or frequency with which comments were heard. Similar points or perspectives were sometimes expressed more than once in each session or in multiple sessions, or were provided in letters from organizations representing a large number of people. Emphasis given to these comments is reflected by one or more asterisks (*heard more than once; **heard frequently; *** comment common to almost every session). Comments are ordered based on content rather than number of asterisks in order to group similar ideas together.

A multitude of ideas for potential changes to the Greenbelt Plan and related policies, initiatives and programs emerged through the consultation, some of which are more effectively addressed through the Greenbelt Plan review process than others. The Greatest Opportunities to Effect Change section takes the suggestions and provides the consultant team's recommendations on the areas that Niagara Region should focus on during the 2015 Provincial review. The purpose of this section is to help Niagara Region to prioritize its efforts on the opportunities that offer the best possibility of success.

During the consultation many participants shared stories that illustrated how the Greenbelt Plan is functioning on the ground. Some of these examples are presented

in sidebars throughout the Benefits, Obstacles and Challenges, and Opportunities for Change sections of the document.



Farmers Market, Grimsby

4 Greenbelt Plan Benefits

During the consultation, participants were encouraged to share their perspectives on the benefits of the Greenbelt Plan. Though many participants did not see any benefits of the Greenbelt, others had a more mixed perspective and a number of Greenbelt Plan benefits did emerge. Most of the benefits concern the protection of green space, improved development patterns, and increased tourism and promotion. This section summarizes the benefits that were expressed throughout the consultation.

Summary

Many participants in the consultation credit the Greenbelt Plan for **protecting green space**, which has allowed for the continuation of farm-related uses and the preservation of ecological features and habitats. Municipalities cite the Greenbelt Plan as being effective in providing policy support to help **limit outward growth**. Planners note that Greenbelt policies provide an effective rationale to **support their growth management, planning and development** objectives.

Along with the complementary legislation of the Growth Plan, the Greenbelt Plan effectively **restricts urban boundary expansions** and allows municipalities to steer new development with greater ease towards downtowns, urban centres, and corridors that are planned to accommodate future growth. This has contributed to **an improved management of growth and development**.

The policies reduce competition for new development amongst municipalities within the Greenbelt and have limited spot development. Many municipalities have experienced **a rise in both infill and higher density development** as a result of Greenbelt protection. By limiting the land that is available for development, the Greenbelt Plan has increased **interest in brownfield redevelopment**, which is contributing to the regeneration of downtowns.

The protection of green space has **increased awareness of a wide range of issues affecting rural and agricultural communities**. For instance, the Greenbelt Plan has been beneficial in providing the public with an **improved understanding of the value of farming and natural ecological features**. The promotion of the **Greenbelt as a symbol of green space protection** has led to an increase in agri-tourism in the region through initiatives such as the Wine Route. This has helped increase awareness about locally grown products and has resulted in **greater interest in farmers markets and local food initiatives**. The Greenbelt Plan has **also increased tourism and economic development** in towns with adjacent nature trails, conservation areas and recreational offerings associated with the Greenbelt.

What We Heard

The following is a broad capture of the perspectives that were expressed during the consultation (*heard more than once; **heard frequently; ***comment common to almost every session):

- Limits urban sprawl ***
- Promotes awareness of the importance of preserving agricultural lands and natural heritage systems and effectively protects both of these systems ***
- Limits sub-division of land and steers development to settlement areas that can effectively support new development **
- Has prevented housing development on the best agricultural land, which was occurring prior to the Greenbelt Plan
- Contains urban growth and increases infill development that likely would not have occurred without the Plan promoting higher density development **
- Promotes brownfield redevelopment *
- Provides additional policy support and an effective rationale for municipalities to use in support of their planning and growth management objectives *
- Supports “good planning”
- Supports the redevelopment and intensification of downtowns (e.g. St. Catharines)
- Limits land speculation *
- Has reduced the competition for land purchase and development resulting in isolated spot development in Greenbelt municipalities
- Ensures that lands within the Greenbelt remain green *
- Provides natural habitats for protection of species *
- Preserves the natural beauty of the region
- Protects waterways in agricultural areas
- Promotes farmers markets *
- Has helped increase tourism and economic development in towns with adjacent trails/conservation areas *
- Promotes protection of the local wine industry
- Promotes consumption of local agricultural products
- Provides regulatory support to create connections to natural areas/trails and has helped boost awareness of the Bruce Trail
- Intention is good and sounds good
- Allows farming to continue as a major economic generator in Niagara
- Reinforces Niagara Escarpment Plan (NEP) protection
- Greenbelt is successful and should be expanded to cover more agricultural lands

St Catharines Downtown Revitalization

Participants pointed to the recent intensification and revitalization of St. Catharines’ downtown as an example of a positive impact of the Greenbelt. Downtown St. Catharines will soon be home to a new performing arts centre, Brock University’s arts school, and a new sports and entertainment complex. Private sector investment has also been strong, with several new condominium developments recently built downtown. In addition, St Catharines has seen considerable redevelopment of brownfield sites. In many cases, incentives for brownfield redevelopment received under municipal Community Improvement Plans and Niagara Region’s “Smarter Niagara Incentive Program” played a role in making the projects possible. In the Queenston Street area, Brickyard Developments is redeveloping a 14.8 acre former industrial/commercial site into a residential community. In Merritton, historical properties such as the Independent Rubber Company and Lybster Mill have been adaptively reused, and the former Domtar lands have been cleaned up for commercial and residential development.

5 Greenbelt Plan Obstacles and Challenges

The majority of feedback received during the consultation was focused on obstacles and challenges posed by the Greenbelt Plan. Within the agricultural community there is a strong and emotional opposition to the implications and application of the Greenbelt Plan policies. Farmers feel that they are bearing the hardship of the Plan while urbanites receive all the benefits. There is a great deal of concern resulting from the implementation of the Plan, particularly with respect to natural heritage objectives.

Many common perspectives were expressed during the consultation, though occasionally perspectives differed on what was a benefit and what was an obstacle of the Plan. After Round One of the consultation, the consultant team organized the feedback on obstacles and challenges into nine themes, which were then presented back to participants in Round Two. The themes have subsequently been refined based on feedback from Round Two. The nine themes help to structure and distill the extensive range of perspectives offered by participants and are as follows:

- Failure to address agricultural viability
- Lack of flexibility in policy and application
- Conflict between Greenbelt Plan objectives
- Lack of Transparency in Plan development/ implementation and the 2015 review process
- Concerns with Greenbelt Plan boundary and natural heritage and hydrologic system mapping
- Lack of awareness by the public and the Province of the realities of farming
- Too many layers and lack of coordination
- Inequity and lack of fairness
- Impact on the type and focus of regional growth

5.1 Failure to Address Agricultural Viability

Summary

Participants largely agree that the Greenbelt Plan protects the agricultural land base, but **does little to protect and in some ways has reduced the viability of farming.**

Policies that are intended to help preserve farmland and natural heritage systems often **limit the ability of farmers to either expand farming operations or make minor additions and repairs** to existing facilities and infrastructure. As a result, many **farm parcels end up lying fallow or transitioning into estate lots.**

There is broad consensus that the government does not support farmers or understand that **farmers are the stewards of the land** and already use best management practices (BMP) to protect it. The agricultural community feels that **the Provincial government imposed the Greenbelt Plan on them and then walked away,** neglecting to address the challenges that the Plan created. This has put farmers in a difficult position, since the **Greenbelt Plan simultaneously restricts their land to agricultural use and imposes policies that reduce the viability of agriculture** on the land.

The Province is viewed as having **failed to promote and understand agriculture as a business and industry.**

The loss of infrastructure like the CanGro plant is seen as a signal of **lack of Provincial commitment** to supporting Niagara farmers. There is widespread concern that the Greenbelt Plan and lack of an effective agricultural strategy at the Provincial and Federal levels create such barriers to viable agriculture that there will be **little opportunity for future generations of farmers.**

Loss of local processing facilities

Niagara Region was formerly the home of several grape and tender fruit processing facilities. Over time, economic challenges have resulted in the closure of all of these facilities. Most recently, in 2008 the CanGro processing plant in St. Davids closed down. It was the last fruit canning plant east of the Rocky Mountains, and with its closure tender fruit farmers were left without a market for their harvest. Two last minute deals to save the plant that would have required financial support from the Federal and Provincial governments fell through. That same year the Federal and Provincial governments pledged \$4 billion to save the auto industry in Ontario. The agricultural community views the failure to make a relatively small investment to save this important piece of food production infrastructure as just one example of the government's lack of commitment to agricultural viability. The site was sold and redeveloped as a residential community.

What We Heard

The following is a broad capture of the perspectives that were expressed during the consultation (*heard more than once; **heard frequently; ***comment common to almost every session):

- The Greenbelt Plan has failed to protect the economic viability of farming ***
- When we preserve agricultural land we also need to protect the ongoing viability of farming ***
- There is no local outlet or infrastructure for farmers to get products to market i.e. canneries **
- Agricultural viability needs some level of primacy in the Greenbelt policies ***
- Agricultural viability needs to take precedence over natural heritage protection in specialty crop areas **
- The mapping of the Greenbelt Natural Heritage System and the impact of adjacencies of agriculture and natural heritage elements have negatively affected agricultural viability **
- The Greenbelt Plan puts agricultural protection at the bottom of the list
- The Province has failed to recognize that farmers are stewards of the land already **
- The Friends of Greenbelt Foundation does not see farming as a sustainable activity and does not understand the best management practices that farmers use
- Many properties have transitioned from active farmland to estate lots **
- Idle farmland is naturalizing and there are no policies that protect against the loss of farmland through naturalization of unused farm land *
- Farmers are leaving the industry because farming is no longer viable *
- Farms end up lying vacant when farmers no longer want to or are able to farm
- The Greenbelt Plan is supposed to promote agriculture but the result is more and more idle fields
- The land has been devalued and can't be severed
- There is no assistance from the Province supporting local growers
- Farmland is usually priced well above its productive capacity and is too expensive for many local farmers
- The number of tender fruit growers has decreased by 1/3 over the past five years – this reflects the loss of canneries



5.2 Lack of Flexibility in Policy and Application

Summary

A reoccurring theme throughout the consultation was frustration over the Greenbelt Plan's **“one size fits all” approach**. There is a need for more flexibility in the Plan **to reflect place-specific conditions**. Participants felt that the Tender Fruit and Grape Area in Niagara is very distinct from other agricultural areas, and many aspects of the Greenbelt Plan do not make sense in this unique context. In particular, due to the small farm parcel sizes in Niagara the **lack of flexibility in setback requirements** from key natural heritage and hydrologic features makes it difficult for farmers to expand farming operations.

Another issue that participants raised was the inflexibility of the Plan to deal **with legal non-conforming commercial and industrial uses that are no longer in use**. There are numerous examples of commercial and manufacturing properties sitting vacant because Greenbelt policies do not allow them to be repurposed. Restrictions on changing designations also cause problems for institutions and businesses within the Greenbelt that want to **sell, convert to another non-agricultural use, or expand onto an adjacent property**.

The Greenbelt Plan's policies on **severing lots and creating new farm lots** were also of concern to

participants. Lot creation requires that the severed and retained lots each must be a minimum of 40 acres in size. This minimum lot size is larger than most existing farm parcels in some Niagara communities. Farm operations – which often consist of several contiguous or non-contiguous agricultural parcels under one owner or leased to one operator – may meet the 40 acre minimum, however severances policies within the Greenbelt Plan apply to individual lots, which are typically much smaller in Niagara's Tender Fruit and Grape Area.

Municipalities voiced concern over **the inability to accommodate community services** such as fire halls, parks, schools and churches because of the lack of available land in settlement areas and restriction of such uses within the Greenbelt. Some **municipal planners felt that the Greenbelt Plan tied their hands**, making it impossible for them to use their local knowledge to apply policy in a place-specific way.

Municipalities, farmers, and business owners have all found the **lack of recourse or an appeals process** to make decisions about setbacks, non-conforming uses, and boundary adjustments to be a major obstacle.

Pelham Community Church

Pelham Community Church on Canboro Road is an example of a grandfathered institutional use that is prevented by the Greenbelt from expanding. The church sits on an angle next to the property line and is unable to expand within its own property. The adjacent one-acre property is too small for viable farming, however the designation cannot be changed to allow expansion of the church. This is a situation where it would be beneficial to have the flexibility to change the designation of a parcel where agriculture is not viable in order to allow the existing legal non-conforming use to expand.

What We Heard

The following is a broad capture of the perspectives that were expressed during the consultation (*heard more than once; **heard frequently; ***comment common to almost every session):

- The Greenbelt takes a “one size fits all” approach which is inflexible and does not respond to the local, on the ground conditions in Niagara ***
- Agriculture is treated in virtually the same manner all across the Greenbelt, in areas that are totally different
 - Farm sizes in North Niagara are much smaller than in South Niagara or elsewhere in the province; the minimum farm parcel size of 40 acres within specialty crop areas is too big and not reflective of smaller actual farm sizes **
- Inflexibility of policies regarding natural heritage and hydrologic setbacks seriously impacts the viability of farming ***
- Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority staff have expressed frustration over the lack of flexibility with setbacks from natural heritage features; the minimum setback is 30 m and the Authority would like to have the flexibility to reduce minimum setback requirements on a case-by-case basis
- There is a lack of flexibility associated with severances ***
 - This can make it difficult to accommodate farm help housing
 - It restricts landowners’ ability to utilize the land in a way that would support agricultural use
- There are many parcels that are too small for farming or where farming is not viable but changing the designation is not permitted so the lands lie idle/dormant *
- The Greenbelt Plan has created a problem with vacant commercial/manufacturing properties that are located in the Greenbelt and now cannot be repurposed *
- It is difficult to rent land in the Greenbelt
- Some institutions in the Greenbelt want to sell their properties but are restricted because the designation on the lot cannot be changed
- Greenbelt policies have limited expansion of existing businesses located in the Greenbelt
 - If businesses need to grow they will most likely move closer to their markets and out of Niagara
- Businesses within the Greenbelt cannot expand and take over adjacent commercial sites unless the buyer wants to use the property as the exact same non-conforming legal use
- There is a limited view of what are admissible uses in buildings situated on agricultural lands
- The Greenbelt Plan does not give planners the flexibility to do their job in the normal way (making professional judgments about interpretation and application of policy)

5.3 Conflict Between Greenbelt Plan Objectives

Summary

Participants in the consultation identified conflicts between Greenbelt Plan objectives. Farmers believe that **natural heritage protection currently takes precedence over agricultural protection** without consideration of the negative effects on farming. There is also a **conflict between agriculture and tourism** with regards to visitors trespassing on farmland and committing vandalism because of the preconceived notion that land within the Greenbelt is public. Finally, there is a **high degree of overlap between natural heritage features and aggregate resources** within the Greenbelt, both of which are protected in the Greenbelt Plan. This results in **conflict between natural heritage and natural resource objectives**.

Concern was also raised that **environmental restrictions are eroding the agricultural land base and agricultural viability**. Participants demonstrated how the natural heritage protection policies limit the ability of farms to grow while at the same time promoting ecosystem restoration that creates habitat for pests and wildlife that are detrimental to agricultural production. There is frustration that **no mechanism exists to prioritize one set of objectives** or deal with competing objectives.

What We Heard

The following is a broad capture of the perspectives that were expressed during the consultation (*heard more than once; **heard frequently; ***comment common to almost every session):

- There are conflicting objectives between preservation of agricultural land and natural heritage features in the Greenbelt Plan ***
 - The Plan's objectives are not being followed through with regards to agricultural viability ***
 - Natural heritage restoration efforts adjacent to agricultural land have a negative effect on fruit crops**
 - Environmentalism has too much influence on the Greenbelt Plan, at the expense of agriculture *
 - Setbacks from natural heritage and hydrologic features hamper farmers' ability to spray, which hampers the ability to grow in that territory *
- Most of the natural heritage policies don't make sense with regard to farming
 - Which objectives are more important? For example, is agriculture more important than agri-tourism?
 - Should greenhouses be allowed on agricultural land? They don't use the prime agricultural land, they just take advantage of the microclimate
- There is a high degree of overlap between natural heritage features and aggregate resources and no mechanism to determine which takes priority
 - The Greenbelt does not allow siting of emergency services to ensure public health and safety but quarries and pits are allowed to operate – there is a disconnect between priorities



5.4 Lack of Transparency in Plan Development /Implementation and 2015 Review Process

Summary

Many participants believe that the Provincial **consultation prior to enactment of the Greenbelt Plan in 2005 was inadequate** and their perspectives were ignored.

There is frustration over the **lack of notification from the Province** for changes made to policies and mapping directly prior to enactment of the Plan and in subsequent mapping.

In general, participants felt that there is a **lack of transparency on the part of the government** with regards to the Greenbelt Plan. **The creation of boundaries seems arbitrary, and there is no process to appeal them.** The community doesn't have a good understanding of how the Greenbelt works and what they can and cannot do on their land.

The lack of clarity for the 2015 Provincial review process is a major source of concern. Participants want a greater understanding of the review process, the components of the Plan that the Province will consider changing, the timeframe for the review and the timeframe for enacting amendments to the Plan.

What We Heard

The following is a broad capture of the perspectives that were expressed during the consultation (*heard more than once; **heard frequently; ***comment common to almost every session):

- Not enough public input into the creation of Greenbelt boundaries and policies **
- Farmers' perspectives were ignored in the consultation prior to the enactment of the Plan **
- The Greenbelt Plan received little input from stakeholders at the time of enactment and municipal councils and staff were not fully engaged or involved *
- The Greenbelt includes highly productive agricultural lands where farmers have played the role of active stewards of the land and, as a consequence, the Greenbelt – because of this, farmers need a much stronger and more proactive voice in terms of shaping Greenbelt policy **
- Communication with farmers needs to be improved; many farmers do not understand why they cannot sever their land or make alterations necessary to the practice of farming **
- The community really doesn't understand the policies and process behind the Greenbelt, how it was created, and the restrictions it contains for landowners *
- There is worry that the Province will not substantively improve the existing Greenbelt Plan or listen to stakeholder issues *
- There is concern that Provincial reviews tend not to be done within promised timeframes
- The Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation has not consulted with the farming community

5.5 Concerns with Greenbelt Plan Boundary and Natural Heritage and Hydrologic System Mapping

Summary

A major source of contention with regard to the Greenbelt Plan is the mapping of boundaries. Participants expressed frustration with the overall Greenbelt Plan boundary, the boundary of Settlement Areas (generally called Urban Areas in municipal official plans), the boundary of the Natural Heritage System, and the mapping of key hydrologic and natural heritage features. Participants perceived **the boundaries to be arbitrary**, lacking a solid scientific basis for their determination. **The Natural Heritage System is very broadly mapped** with large cropped areas within it. In some cases the Protected Countryside boundary is inconsistent with the land uses on the ground, illustrated by **the inclusion of land that is not appropriate for Greenbelt protection** such as non-active farmland that has not been in active production for decades, industrial properties, and areas where full municipal servicing is in place to support additional growth and development. Several elected officials expressed the desire to remove portions of their municipalities from the Protected Countryside to provide additional housing and community facilities and to better address municipal fiscal realities.

In addition to concerns with boundaries, there is **overwhelming discontent with the mapping of the**

key natural heritage and hydrologic features. The mapping has classified man-made agricultural drainage ditches as key hydrologic features. Woodlots which are functioning components of farms have been classified as key natural heritage features. This has hampered property owners' ability to manage their land and expand their operations due to **setback policies and the requirement for costly environmental impact statements**. The problem is compounded in some Niagara communities, where the small farm parcels combined with the policies regarding setbacks and environmental impact statements make it **difficult or impossible to site farm-related facilities appropriately**. As with the boundaries, participants expressed the view that the **Province did not use a robust scientific method for classifying key natural heritage and hydrologic features** and has imposed their classifications on the community without adequate notification.

A challenge voiced throughout the consultation was the **lack of a process for appealing Greenbelt and Settlement Area boundaries, the Natural Heritage System boundary, and the mapping of key natural heritage and hydrologic features**.



Concerns with Greenbelt Plan Boundary and Natural Heritage and Hydrologic System Mapping



Niagara-on-the-Lake key hydrologic and key natural heritage features identification

Niagara-on-the-Lake is criss-crossed by a substantial man-made agricultural drainage system which often bisects farm parcels. Most of these man-made drains have no base flow and some contain sections of road ditches. However, the mapping of key hydrologic features currently includes these drains, which means that the Greenbelt Plan's study requirements and setback provisions are triggered when development or site alteration is proposed within 120 metres. As farm parcels in Niagara-on-the-Lake are small compared to other municipalities, this affects farmers' ability to appropriately locate farm buildings. In addition, recent Ministry of Natural Resources mapping has classified woodlots as wetlands, which are key natural heritage features, removing farmers' ability to manage this component of their farming operations.

Concerns with Greenbelt Plan Boundary and Natural Heritage and Hydrologic System Mapping

What We Heard

The following is a broad capture of the perspectives that were expressed during the consultation (*heard more than once; **heard frequently; ***comment common to almost every session):

- Greenbelt boundaries are arbitrary and the Province needs to clarify the rationale they use ***
- Hydrologic features are too broadly defined ***
- The classification of man-made drainage swales as natural heritage features is extremely problematic **
- Farmers paid to create a drainage system in Niagara-on-the-Lake which is now classified as a natural heritage system; now they are largely prevented from taking actions necessary to maintain the drainage function
- Mapping of Greenbelt Natural Heritage System is too broad and encompassing **
- Requirements to complete environmental studies in hydrological setback zones are expensive and further compromise agricultural viability **
- A woodlot is a functioning part of the farm and the Province should not have classified it as a natural heritage feature
 - Farmers used to be able to remove portions of woodlots and drain the land for agricultural production but now that woodlots have been reclassified as wetlands, the Conservation Authorities Act does not allow this
- Farm parcel sizes in the Niagara Tender Fruit and Grape Area are much smaller and restrictive setbacks make it difficult to take advantage of open areas for crop production, particularly as parcels are criss-crossed with drainage ditches that are classified as hydrologic features **
- Farmers have suffered economically due to natural heritage and hydrologic feature setbacks and this restricts the ability to expand farming operations
- The 30m buffer is intended to create natural heritage corridors for wildlife, however wildlife often do not use these features in ways that science predicts *
- The Greenbelt designates properties in the agricultural system as part of the Tender Fruit and Grape Area that have not been active farmland for years and are not likely to be farmed in the future *
- Soils outside the Greenbelt boundary are often better so why are they not in the Greenbelt?
- The microclimate in the west end of Grimsby is not entirely conducive to tender fruit production because of frost pockets and contamination of land from the QEW, but it is all treated the same under the Greenbelt Plan
- Landowners were not notified about the changes to the mapping of the Natural Heritage System in the final version of the Greenbelt Plan
- "One size" does not fit all and boundaries should be decided on a case-by-case basis
- Local politics had too much influence on boundaries
- It is unfair that the Settlement Area boundary was changed in St. Catharines for the hospital but for local businesses it cannot be changed, in some cases merely to include the entire property so the business can grow and expand
- Boundaries of the Greenbelt Plan and Niagara Escarpment Plan have limited municipalities' ability to provide for additional employment lands and create new community facilities
- The problem is not just the arbitrary nature of the Greenbelt boundary but also the restriction of non-agricultural lands in the Greenbelt

5.6 Lack of Awareness by the Public and the Province of the Realities of Farming

Summary

Participants from the agricultural community stated that there is a **general lack of awareness by the public and the Province of the realities of farming** as an industry and a business. There is seen to be a **disconnect between the vision of farming of those who put the Greenbelt in place and those who understand the realities on the ground**. Farmers feel that the Greenbelt Plan promotes a trendy green lifestyle for urbanites but imposes additional hardships on them. **The lack of awareness or support for farming viability** and the impact of the Greenbelt Plan on agriculture has resulted in what many farmers refer to as the **“urban-rural divide.”** This divide has created tension between farming, recreation and tourism in relation to the Greenbelt.

Farmers state that members of the public are often misled by Greenbelt signs to believe that their farmland is public land, which has caused people to **illegally trespass on their property**. Another example of the urban-rural divide is the notion that farmers markets and local food initiatives largely support farming. In actuality, these industries support only a small portion of the agricultural industry. Our **education system has a gap when it comes to agriculture** and where food comes from which makes it difficult for non-farmers to understand the challenges to agricultural viability created by the Greenbelt Plan.

What We Heard

The following is a broad capture of the perspectives that were expressed during the consultation (*heard more than once; **heard frequently; ***comment common to almost every session):

- There is a disconnect between the vision of farming of those who put the Greenbelt in place and those who understand the realities and practice of farming on the ground **
- Urbanites don't understand that there are negative impacts associated with Greenbelt policies, particularly to farmers *
- Increasing the number of regulations/restrictions on land development within the Greenbelt has widened the divide between urbanites and rural communities, and instills a sense that Toronto does not understand rural and agricultural issues
- Wealthy “Country Living” folks have contributed to the reduction of the active agricultural land supply **
- There is an issue with trespassing – there is a misconception that if a property is in the Greenbelt it is considered public land **

- There has been a failure to effectively market the Greenbelt
- There is a general belief that the Province regards farmers as a group of people unfamiliar with land management best practices *
- There is a gap in education with regards to where food comes from and the importance of agriculture in our society
- Educating councillors concerning the difficulties experienced as a result of the Greenbelt has been difficult

5.7 Too Many Layers and Lack of Coordination

Summary

Participants stated that there is **a lack of coordination of policies and leadership** to support farming initiatives. Farmers expressed **discontent with the multiple layers of regulation and regulatory bodies** including the Greenbelt Plan (Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing), Niagara Escarpment Commission, Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority, Ministry of Agriculture and Food and Ministry of Natural Resources. **Regulations and policy definitions are inconsistently interpreted** between ministries, which has made it difficult to effectively administer policies and for the public to understand which regulations affect their properties. At a high level, there is **a lack of connectivity between the Greenbelt Plan and the policies and legislation of other Provincial ministries and agencies**. For example, while the Greenbelt Plan protects tender fruit lands for grape growing, the LCBO allows very little shelf space for Canadian wines.

What We Heard

The following is a broad capture of the perspectives that were expressed during the consultation (*heard more than once; **heard frequently; ***comment common to almost every session):

- There are too many layers of government ***
- In implementing the Greenbelt Plan, there should be more planning authority at the local level ***
- In implementing the Greenbelt Plan, there is too much planning authority at the local level *
- The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Ministry of Infrastructure, Ministry of Natural Resources, and Niagara Escarpment Commission do not have a method or process to coordinate their different plans **
- The different levels of legislation negatively impact land use and limit profits for farming (Niagara Escarpment Plan, Greenbelt Plan, Oak Ridges Moraine Plan)

Applicable Policy, Plans and Legislation

Here are just some of the policies, plans, regulations and acts that might apply to properties in the Greenbelt:

Provincial Policy Statement

Greenbelt Plan

Niagara Escarpment Plan

Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe

Aggregate Resources Act

Clean Water Act

Drainage Act

Environmental Assessment Act

Fisheries Act (federal)

Ontario Regulation 155/06: Regulation of Development, Interference with Wetlands and Alterations to Shoreline and Watercourses

Watershed Plans under the Niagara Water Quality Protection Strategy

Regional Official Plans

Local Official Plans

Zoning By-Laws

Too Many Layers and Lack of Coordination

- There is a lack of clear definitions and there are vague goals in the Greenbelt Plan **
- There is a lack of connectivity with other government ministries and agencies and their policies and legislation **
 - Ontario's Wine Content and Labeling Act reduces the domestic content in Canadian blended wine while the Greenbelt preserves tender fruit lands for grape growing
- Greenbelt policies are ambiguous and can be interpreted in several different and conflicting ways
- The Plan uses definitions that are inconsistent with other Provincial policies i.e. property boundaries
- There is a need for more clarity in policy language. For example, section 4.5.3 of the Plan "bringing the use more into conformity"

Provincial Wine Policies

Due to the fact that the LCBO has a significant influence on alcohol sales in Ontario, its policies regarding local wine are extremely important to grape growers. Growers are frustrated that the amount of shelf space devoted to local wines at the LCBO is not comparable to what is seen in other countries. Many growers feel that they need other options for selling their wines, as well as better opportunities to promote their wineries. They see a disconnect between the Greenbelt Plan preserving their land for agriculture – and in Niagara Region particularly for grape and tender fruit production – and LCBO and other Provincial policies limiting the market for their grapes.

5.8 Inequity and Lack of Fairness

Summary

The Greenbelt Plan was consistently cited for its inequity and lack of fairness in that it **restricts land use and property rights**. Some property owners perceive that the Greenbelt **has reduced the market value of properties within the Protected Countryside** because of the restrictions it places on them, while others are frustrated that their property assessments keep increasing despite these restrictions. There is a widespread feeling that the Greenbelt Plan has limited owners' property rights without just compensation. Farmers are extremely opposed to the **restrictions on lot severances**, which have taken away their ability to create retirement lots or sell off a lot to get through a difficult financial time. The agricultural community also voiced discontent over **paying high taxes while their ability to expand or change their farming practices has been either removed or diminished**.

What We Heard

The following is a broad capture of the perspectives that were expressed during the consultation (*heard more than once; **heard frequently; ***comment common to almost every session):

- It is unfair that the Greenbelt Plan restricts what farmers can do with their own land ***
- The Greenbelt Plan has expropriated land without compensation ***
- People who do not want to be farmers anymore cannot sell their land to developers to make a profit
- The Greenbelt has hurt small property owners who bought properties prior to the Greenbelt legislation and wanted to sell their land for development
- Limitations concerning the severing of lots are too restrictive and have reduced the ability of landowners within the Greenbelt to profit through severing and selling a lot as landowners elsewhere can **
- The Greenbelt Plan has taken away the ability to create retirement lots **
- Farmers are unable to ensure the succession of their land because they can't create smaller retirement lots and sell the bulk of their land
- Farmers used to subdivide their land and sever and sell a lot in order to financially weather catastrophic events or retire, but the Greenbelt Plan has taken this security away
- Property assessments and MPAC assessments for farms are going up despite restrictions on land *
- Farmers located in the Greenbelt are at a disadvantage compared to farmers in the rest of Ontario
- The cost of the Greenbelt is on farmers' shoulders while urbanites get the advantages

5.9 Impact on the Type and Focus of Regional Growth

Summary

While regional growth patterns have been long established through Regional policy, having been part of the Regional Policy Plan since 1978, participants from the development community remarked that the Greenbelt Plan **has been seen to force development to the southern part of Niagara Region**, which is far from commercial centres and employment areas located in the northern part of the Region. **Affordability of land and housing has significantly decreased** in the settlement areas of Greenbelt municipalities, which has impaired residents' ability to relocate within their municipality and the ability of newcomers to settle.

There is **resistance in the community to the denser form of housing** that is now being built due to the restriction on land, and residents feel that **the reduction in construction of single family homes in Greenbelt communities has limited the ability of families to settle in Greenbelt communities**. Participants suggested that the Greenbelt has forced development onto sites that are not appropriate for development. Some municipalities indicated that **land that they have already serviced was put into the Greenbelt**, wasting

their investment since development on this land is now restricted. Municipalities were also concerned that the limited availability of land for new growth has **impaired their ability to create complete communities**.

Some municipalities have struggled to find new land for employment uses, industrial uses and community uses.

There are also **tax implications to the change in regional growth patterns**. Greenbelt municipalities may have to raise taxes as they are restricted in growing their tax base, particularly their industrial and commercial tax base.

Complete Communities

Complete communities provide all the necessities of daily life within reasonable proximity. In Niagara, the restrictions that the Greenbelt Plan has put on land in the Protected Countryside have made it difficult for municipalities to provide some of the components of a complete community. Some elements of a complete community are:

Recreational facilities

Emergency and health facilities

Fire halls

Educational facilities

Houses of worship

Employment opportunities

Residential units

Grocery stores

What We Heard

The following is a broad capture of the perspectives that were expressed during the consultation (*heard more than once; **heard frequently; ***comment common to almost every session):

- Plan impacts affordability in Greenbelt communities**
 - When you restrict development, land values rise, especially in landlocked municipalities
 - Affordability of housing does not seem to have ever been a concern during the creation of Greenbelt and Places to Grow; now it is an issue
- Employment land has been lost because the Greenbelt has created pressure to redevelop land for housing *
- The Greenbelt Plan has caused previous infrastructure investments to be wasted because growth is no longer permitted in certain areas in the Greenbelt where the infrastructure is already present *
- It is challenging to accommodate growth when there is no expansion to the urban boundary within an area that is already serviced
- The Greenbelt Plan has stopped new development altogether in many Greenbelt municipalities and this was never the intention *
- There are greenfield sites that have been designated for development but now are unable to develop
- Development has been forced to inappropriate sites
- Leap frogging of development puts additional pressure on municipalities outside the Protected Countryside
 - There is a leapfrog effect of growth occurring in Niagara Falls, Thorold, and Welland
- The Greenbelt Plan has forced higher densities than what people are looking for
- Multi-unit infill development is generally small and difficult to sell; most developers will not look at municipalities that are landlocked and restricted by the Greenbelt
- There is negative reaction to multi-unit developments which are required if places like St. Catharines want to continue to grow
- The Greenbelt Plan is preventing young families from moving into local communities
- The Greenbelt Plan limits housing choice in Greenbelt communities – people have to choose between living in a single family home in South Niagara, or a smaller, multi-family unit in North Niagara
- As part of this review, Niagara Region needs to look at where 2041 growth projections will occur and where the best places are to grow
- The Greenbelt Plan has forced industrial development to South Niagara, creating an unfair taxation situation
- There is limited transportation infrastructure and existing employment in the southern part of the region where most development must now be directed
- Plan creates challenges for municipalities' revenue-generating potential; municipalities can't increase their tax base through development on new land so they have to increase taxes
- There is a sense that the Province does not look at Niagara Region as a place to grow in the future
- From the regional perspective, there is enough land for all uses for the next 50 years – every municipality does not have to develop in the same way



Lake Gibson, Thorold

6 Opportunities for Change

The second round of consultation asked participants to move beyond the obstacles and challenges associated with the Greenbelt Plan and focus on ways that the Plan can be improved or refined to meet their needs more effectively. Suggestions from Round One were grouped into five themes to help structure Round Two of the consultation. Based on feedback received in Round Two, these five themes were further refined and reorganized into six topic areas.

This section of the report is organized into the following six topic areas:

- Make the Plan/2015 review process transparent and collaborative
- Introduce agricultural viability as a key objective
- Provide for complete communities
- Ensure a streamlined process with greater flexibility in place-specific application
- Enhance education and awareness about the distinct nature of Niagara and its contribution within the Greenbelt
- Establish an improved process for determining boundaries

Each of the topic areas contains a **summary**, a more detailed bulleted list of **what we heard** during the consultation, including differing opinions on certain topics, and a distillation of participants' ideas for **proposed changes** to the Plan and its policies, to the process of implementation, and to related policies, initiatives and programs.

6.1 Make the Plan / 2015 Review Process Transparent and Collaborative

Summary

Participants shared many ideas during the consultation about how to make the Greenbelt Plan, its implementation, and the upcoming 2015 Provincial review process more transparent and collaborative. **Farmers see themselves as partners in the Greenbelt**, and would like to be treated as partners during the review and as part of the ongoing implementation of the Plan.

One of the messages that came across most consistently during the consultation was that **it is imperative that the 2015 Provincial review is transparent, accessible and open to the public**. Due to the significant impact of the Greenbelt Plan on agriculture in Niagara Region, farmers emphasize the **importance of having a voice throughout the process** and the need to have a critical voice at the table for Niagara. There is a strong desire to have **better information about the review process**, including when it will begin, how long it will last, how it will be run and how the community can participate. Participants also wanted to know exactly **what can and cannot be changed through the review**, including whether or not the Province is open to incorporating a funding mechanism into the Plan to accomplish specific goals or to changing ministerial responsibility for the Greenbelt Plan.

Municipalities emphasized that they need to be given **sufficient time to comment during the review process**. To broaden the reach of the consultation, it was suggested that the Province should use multimedia tools to solicit public input.

Participants suggested that the Provincial review should incorporate more than simply a consultation. **A cost-benefit analysis of the Greenbelt Plan, an inventory of active land use covered by the plan, and a demographic analysis of the Greenbelt area** were mentioned as potential components of the review. Participants were also anxious for the Province to **study comparable greenbelts from elsewhere in the world**, particularly how they support farmers. Specific areas in the Greenbelt Plan that **require clarification through the review**, such as the definition of the term “agriculture-related uses,” the rules and process around lot severances, and the prioritization of the Plan’s objectives were brought to the consultant team’s attention. The agricultural community expressed interest in **taking Provincial staff on site tours** to show them first hand their concerns about how the Plan is working on the ground.

Participants also had ideas about how to make **the implementation of the Greenbelt Plan more accessible and accountable on an ongoing basis**. There was broad-based agreement that **an appeals process is needed to make determinations on a case-by-case basis** regarding mapping of key natural heritage and hydrologic features and setbacks from these features, changes in designations, and other Greenbelt-related concerns. The exact nature of this appeals body, however, was in some dispute. Some participants favoured a model similar to the Niagara Escarpment Commission, while others were vehemently opposed to this idea; some thought the existing Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation or Greenbelt Council should be overhauled to perform this function, while others suggested the creation of a brand new Greenbelt Commission; still other participants felt that regional and local municipalities were in the best position to handle place-specific determinations regarding Greenbelt matters. There was agreement among participants that **there must be a diversity of representation on any type of sounding board**, including a strong diversified agricultural presence with both farmers and farm-related business people.

What We Heard

The following is a broad capture of the perspectives that were expressed during the consultation (*heard more than once; **heard frequently; ***comment common to almost every session):

Considerations for the 2015 Provincial Review

- There is a need to get the Province to realize just how important the agricultural industry is in Niagara **
- The Province needs to be more transparent about the Greenbelt review process **
- Municipalities and individuals need to have enough time to comment during the review process **
- Farmers need to form a collective voice through the entire process **
- A five year review period would be much better **
- The Greenbelt Plan will be decimated if you remove the ten year review provision
- As part of the review, the Province should take another look at or study economic implications of the Greenbelt Plan, trends in the agriculture industry and the challenges of sustaining the next generation of farmers **
- Multimedia tools should be used in the review process to gather public input
- We need to understand the demographics of the Greenbelt area, e.g. age structure
- The Provincial government should keep an inventory of existing land use and designated use within the Greenbelt
- There is a need for “on the ground” tours to see the conflicts *
- There is a need to be clear about exactly what will and will not be done through the Provincial Greenbelt Plan review *
- The Greenbelt Plan should be put under the leadership of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food with a clear mandate to protect and promote agriculture *
- Niagara Region should have an audience with the Premier to voice its concerns
- There are many questions about the review:
 - What decisions or changes are able to be made during this review?
 - How is the review going to be run?
 - How might the Plan change from its current state?
 - Will the Province be willing to incorporate a funding mechanism to accomplish specific goals?
- The impact of the Greenbelt Plan versus other legislation (NEP, ORMP, etc) that is piled on top needs to be understood
- As part of the Provincial review, real scenarios should be put on the table to see how they would play out
- The Province should look at how other provinces/ countries have supported their farmers, particularly when there is a greenbelt in place *
- When considering other greenbelt models, it is important to consider if the circumstances there are comparable to those in Niagara

Make the Plan / 2015 Review Process Transparent and Collaborative

Areas in Need of Clarification

- There needs to be clarification about what is the highest priority in terms of the objectives in the Plan**
 - There should be a clear policy in place to allow the importance of both aggregate resources and natural heritage features to be weighed to determine which should take priority in any given circumstance
 - Examine whether there is land under the Niagara Escarpment Plan that should be under the Greenbelt Plan or vice versa
 - There should be more detailed work to better define and understand which natural heritage features have significance
 - There needs to be clarification about the role of greenhouses located within specialty crop areas in the Greenbelt
 - There needs to be clarification concerning lot severances – what’s allowed, what’s not allowed, minimum sizes, when the severed lot becomes deemed Agricultural Purposes Only (APO)
- There needs to be more clarity around permitted uses and what is considered secondary uses or agricultural-related uses within the Greenbelt
- ### Creating a sounding board/appeals process
- There needs to be an appeals process that can assess, on a case by case basis, if properties and natural heritage features should be included in the Greenbelt Plan ***
 - Create a Greenbelt Commission and have it function in a similar way as the NEC
 - Any sounding board that is created must not be like the NEC *
 - There must be diversity of representation on a sounding board or council
 - On any sounding board there must be transparency in the decision-making process
 - Consider having a Greenbelt Plan ombudsman
 - Local planners and municipal staff should have more discretion and delegated authority with regards to local application of Greenbelt-related matters **
- Municipalities need to be empowered to make decisions around severances, farm buildings, minimum lot sizes, setbacks, spraying
- The Province should allow Niagara Region to have more flexibility in administering the Greenbelt Plan – more on the ground control and interaction
 - It is not a good idea to give municipalities more leeway for interpretation and local application of policies
 - The Greenbelt Council’s role should be strengthened, it should include active farmers that represent different commodity groups and farm businesses, and it could be given the ability to hear appeals
 - The Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation must have more accountability to stakeholders
 - There should be more farmers and representation on the Foundation Board from diverse businesses (particularly those associated with agricultural activities)
 - Agricultural viability should be part of the mandate of the Foundation

Proposed Changes

- The Foundation should provide funding to support agricultural viability, create local food processing opportunities, and promote local food distribution
 - The level of appeal for Greenbelt-related issues should be the same as if you were appealing a Zoning By-law or Official Plan Amendment
 - Outside the urban boundary there should be a land use commission that makes decisions instead of the municipality, and it should have farmer representation on it
 - Local Councils understand the farming community and decision-making should remain with them outside the urban boundary
- 1.** In the 2015 Provincial review, the following recommendations should be considered:
- Well in advance of the start of the review, the Province should define and share its intentions regarding the start date for the review, the length of the review and the process of the review;
 - There should be adequate time for municipalities and the public to comment, review amendments, and provide feedback on drafts of the revised Plan;
 - The mechanism for change of the Plan (i.e. changes to all or certain aspects of the Act, the Plan document, related regulations and/or bodies and agencies) should be shared with the public prior to the start of the review;
 - The Province should include on the Review Body adequate representation from the diverse farming community across the Greenbelt and in particular from Niagara;
 - The following analyses should be undertaken as part of the review:
 - The economic implications of the Greenbelt Plan, in particular, on the agricultural industry;
 - An inventory of existing and designated uses within the Greenbelt;
 - The changing demographics and age structure in the Greenbelt as they relate to viable agriculture;
 - A review of other jurisdictions and their lessons learned in implementing greenbelts (National Capital Greenbelt (Ottawa), British Columbia's Agricultural Land Reserve, Melbourne Green Wedges, Vienna Greenbelt, UK Greenbelt);
 - An examination of whether there is land within the Niagara Escarpment Plan boundary that should be removed and put within the Greenbelt Plan boundary and vice versa;
 - Consultation with stakeholders on the appropriate minimum lot size for the Tender Fruit and Grape Area in Niagara;

Make the Plan / 2015 Review Process Transparent and Collaborative

- A consideration of boundary refinements;
 - More detailed, on the ground analysis of Greenbelt Natural Heritage System mapping and mapping of key natural heritage and hydrologic features;
 - Provincial staff should go on site tours with local guides of Greenbelt areas that have been identified as problematic;
 - Multimedia tools should be used to ensure broad public input; and
 - Ministerial responsibility for the Greenbelt Act/ Plan should be reviewed, and the potential for the Ministry of Agriculture and Food to take a lead role should be considered.
- 2.** The following terms and concepts in the Plan should be reviewed and/or expanded for clarity and consistency between Provincial plans:
- definition of agriculture-related uses, development;
 - greater detail and parameters related to agricultural value-added activities;
 - parameters around greenhouses as a permitted agricultural use;
 - rules around lot severances and surplus farm parcels; and
 - identification of clear policy to allow the importance of Greenbelt objectives to be weighed to determine which should take priority in any given circumstance:
 - Natural heritage protection vs. agricultural viability
 - Natural heritage protection vs. non-renewable resources.
- 3.** Introduce a body and/or process to create greater transparency and access to municipalities and the broader community;
- The purpose of the body/process should be to interpret and clarify the Greenbelt Plan and/ or its boundaries (for example, Natural Heritage System boundaries, clarification of future uses on grandfathered sites) and hear appeals;
 - This could be a role for the Greenbelt Council or a separate commission;
- On this body there should be diverse representation, including adequate representation from the diverse farming community, particularly in Niagara.
- 4.** Ensure the Greenbelt Council membership includes active farmers that represent different commodity groups and farm businesses.
- 5.** Refine the structure of responsibility within the Greenbelt to give upper tier municipalities more authority in terms of local application of Greenbelt policies, including with regards to:
- location of farm buildings/setback provisions;
 - key natural heritage and hydrologic feature mapping;
 - naturalized restoration requirements adjacent to farmed crops.
- 6.** Use the key outcomes from Niagara Region's Greenbelt Review process to identify Niagara's priorities for discussion with the Province.

6.2 Introduce Agricultural Viability as a Key Objective

Summary

Farmers feel that because the Greenbelt Plan introduces restrictions on their land and preserves the long term land use as agriculture, **the Province has a responsibility to keep farming and the agriculture industry viable.**

Agricultural viability should therefore be reinforced as a key objective of the Greenbelt Plan, in particular within the Tender Fruit and Grape Area. Participants in the consultation also suggested that as **simply a land use document, the Greenbelt Plan cannot do its job**; it needs to be part of a set of initiatives, strategies and tools. Ideas for promoting agricultural viability described in this section go beyond the Greenbelt to address agriculture and food policy on a provincial and national level.

Introducing the viability of farming, not just the protection of farm land, in the Plan is a key distinction and important addition for the farming community. Currently, while the Greenbelt Plan protects agricultural lands and farming uses, the word “farmer” never appears in the Plan. **Farmers request that the word “farmer” be included** in the revised Greenbelt Plan and for the Plan to acknowledge the key role they play in helping to achieve its goals. They also would like the Plan to **recognize the**

value of ongoing best management practices and the environmental benefits of farmed land.

Modifying the definition of key hydrologic feature to distinguish man-made from natural features

was a suggestion that was heard frequently during the consultation. In general, farmers would like to see **agriculture prioritized over the natural heritage objectives** in the Plan, particularly in Niagara’s Tender Fruit and Grape Area where the unique combination of microclimate and soil conditions is irreplaceable. The prioritization of agriculture over other Plan objectives, particularly natural heritage objectives, in the Tender Fruit and Grape Area would address issues such as the damage to crops caused by ecosystem restoration adjacent to farmed lands.

One way to ensure that agricultural objectives are prioritized in future would be **to put the Greenbelt Plan under the leadership of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food with a clear mandate to protect and promote agriculture and the ability to farm.**

The consultant team heard that the Greenbelt Plan needs to be **a living plan that can accommodate changes to agricultural practices** and embrace agricultural innovation in the future. The Plan cannot be static and regulate agricultural lands for ten years at a time without consideration of how the agricultural industry might change and adapt to new market conditions.

Participants emphasized the need to **preserve the infrastructure of food production.** Processing plants and freezing facilities are essential to support tender fruit growers. The Province needs to understand that farming cannot survive without **an adequate system for getting agricultural products to market** in a fresh, frozen or processed state.

One way that participants suggested that the Province could support agricultural viability was through its own food, wine, and procurement policies. An **emphasis should be placed on the promotion of local food and wine**, and broader public sector procurement should support local food first. The LCBO should provide more shelf space for local wines, and wineries should be able to sell their products outside the LCBO.

Introduce Agricultural Viability as a Key Objective

A multitude of ideas for financial supports for agriculture emerged through the consultation. Farmers felt that the **tax revenue that the government receives from farming should be reinvested as subsidies or incentives**. A minimum income system could be created for farmers, where the government subsidizes the difference between the price farmers get for their products from the market and what they need to support themselves. The government could also **purchase conservation easements on Greenbelt properties** or introduce **an Ecological Goods and Services incentive program**.

Another way to address agricultural viability would be by lowering farmers' production costs. **Property tax on agricultural properties could be reduced or relief provided**, with the Province making up for the income that municipalities would lose from this change. It was also suggested that the **Provincial government should pay for crop insurance** for farmers within the Greenbelt.

Financial incentives should go beyond just supporting farmers. Participants stressed that it is important to **recognize and support all parts of the Niagara agricultural industry**. Means such as **Community**

Improvement Plans could be used to address both agricultural and community concerns in the Greenbelt.

There is a strong feeling in the agricultural community that the Greenbelt Plan was “pushed” onto landowners; **a corresponding “pull” in the form of Provincial support** is required to convince them to become willing participants in the Plan.

Rural Community Improvement Plans

Funding for Community Improvement Plans (CIPs) in Niagara is available from the Smarter Niagara Incentive Program. Recently, Niagara Region has been exploring creative ways to use CIPs to revitalize the regional economy. A 2012 amendment to the Regional Policy Plan allows Niagara Region to fund CIPs in all areas of local municipalities, including outside of Urban Area boundaries. There is potential to use rural CIPs to make investments in infrastructure to support agricultural communities in Niagara.

What We Heard

The following is a broad capture of the perspectives that were expressed during the consultation (*heard more than once; **heard frequently; ***comment common to almost every session):

Changes to the Greenbelt Plan

- The updated Greenbelt Plan needs to address the preservation of farming and not just land preservation ***
- Modify the definition of key hydrologic feature: distinguish man-made from naturally formed features ***
 - Adopt definitions from the Watercourse Mapping Update based on Niagara Region's new digital terrain model
- The microclimate and soil conditions of the Tender Fruit and Grape Area cannot be replaced, therefore, agriculture objectives should take precedence over other priorities in the Greenbelt, e.g. natural heritage, tourism ***
- The word farmer needs to be in the plan to recognize the importance of the people not just the land **
- The Greenbelt Plan policies adopt a “one size fits all” approach which does not work given the distinct characteristics of farms in Niagara-on-the-Lake (small farm sizes, farm drainage system)**
- The Greenbelt Plan policies create restrictions to farming practices that challenge farmers' ability to farm
- The Greenbelt Plan needs to support infrastructure to make farming viable, e.g. abattoirs, processing plants, distribution networks, access to markets *
- The Greenbelt should support irrigation systems to help farmers; the challenge is that it is expensive for farmers to set up and they run the risk of being prohibited by water course protection
- The Plan should be put under the leadership of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food with a clear mandate to protect and promote agriculture *
- The Plan should allow for smaller lots to recognize the distinct nature of agricultural lands in Niagara and provide more opportunities for young farmers just starting out *
- The retention of the surplus farm dwelling provision is very important to farmers as it helps farmers wanting to enter the industry or expand their operations by reducing the cost per acre of farmland *
- Instead of being static make the Plan a living document that can adapt to changes in the agricultural industry*
- The Plan should provide more support for value-added farming activities and should allow farming to adapt and change in future *
- Change the Plan from a greenbelt to an agricultural preserve/foodbelt*
- Help increase value proposition for farmers to keep farming and/or sustain farming using value-added policies
- There should be exceptions to allow farmers to diversify the farm-related operations on their land

Introduce Agricultural Viability as a Key Objective

- There is a need to re-evaluate the quality of soils to confirm whether land is prime for agriculture or natural heritage protection
- The Plan should include an overall Provincial statement that recognizes the importance of the economic prosperity of producers
- There should be recognition in the Plan that the agriculture industry produces jobs
- Recognize farmers as employers and the employment value provided by the farming industry
- Policies should be introduced that recognize the value of ongoing best management practices and environmental benefits of farmland; for example, recognize that farmed land/orchards provide habitat and wildlife linkages

Related policies, initiatives and programs

- It is important to preserve the infrastructure of food production (eg processing plants, freezing facilities) **

- There should be programs to attract new farmers to the region and turn over farm land at a good value
- Organizations that support farming such as the Ontario Federation of Agriculture need to be strengthened
- Agricultural zoning needs to regulate what farming activities are compatible and appropriately sited
- There should be a national food strategy

Introduce financial support for farming/farmers

- Consider redirecting tax money to reinvest in/ incentivize farming and help with infrastructure upkeep **
- The government should subsidize the difference between the price farmers can get for their products and what they need to support themselves *
- Introduce an Ecological Goods and Services incentive program *
- Consider the Provincial purchase of conservation easements *

- Easements where farmers are compensated the difference between farm value and development value could address the perceived inequity caused by the Greenbelt Plan
- Introduce financial compensation for leaving riparian areas around waterways
- Create a measured minimum income system for farmers
- Subsidies to farmers should be comparable to those offered in other countries, since that is who local farmers are competing against
- Expand stewardship initiatives (with funding) through conservation authorities and other regional initiatives
- A food tax could be used to support agriculture *
- Consider using Community Improvement Plans *
 - A CIP for agriculture could bring together agriculture and community issues in Greenbelt communities

Introduce Agricultural Viability as a Key Objective

- CIPs can be used to tailor policies based on the specific features of a particular area to solve the problem of the Greenbelt Plan's "one size fits all" approach
 - Support initiatives that will provide opportunities for farming expansion/growth, in particular, funding for new technology, sustainable farming advancements *
 - Provide better incentives for farmers to transport tender fruit to local areas
 - There is a need for an economic strategy at the Provincial level to address agricultural market changes
 - Consider compensation for people who wanted to sell their farms as a means of retirement and/or sever retirement lots
 - Consider tax exemptions for farmers that are seniors/retired, e.g. removing the capital gains tax when a farmer sells his or her farm
 - There is a need for fairness in agricultural lands taxation – MPAC assessment
 - Reduce or eliminate property taxes on farmland in the Greenbelt – maybe the Province could make up for the income that municipalities would lose by lowering taxes *
 - Non-farmers are purchasing farms and then renting the agricultural land so that they can pay agricultural tax rates - in this situation these people should pay higher tax rates
 - The Federal and Provincial governments should pay for crop insurance for farmers within the Greenbelt or farmers of specialty crops
- Promotion of local food**
- The Province should facilitate the sale of local agricultural products **
 - More Canadian wines at the LCBO and ability to sell wine outside the LCBO
 - Broader public sector procurement should support local food first
 - There are lots of little things that the Ontario government controls that should be part of its support for agricultural viability and the Greenbelt Plan – wages, the LCBO, retailer support of local agriculture*
 - In public sector procurement and provincial policies, local food should take precedence over imports
 - The Greenbelt Plan should say that every food retailer in the Greenbelt shall have a section for local food
 - The Province, through the Greenbelt and other means, should capitalize on the local food movement to promote Ontario agriculture
 - Tie the Greenbelt Plan to food security and safety
 - Promotion for tender fruit farming should be done through highway signage, tourism brochures, newspapers and inclusion in major festivals
 - Promotion of wineries could be expanded to include promotion of tender fruit

Introduce Agricultural Viability as a Key Objective

Proposed Changes

1. Recognizing that the microclimate and soil conditions create an irreplaceable resource in Niagara, prioritize agricultural viability as an objective over other Greenbelt objectives for lands within the Niagara Peninsula Tender Fruit and Grape Area.
 - expanding the shelf space devoted to Canadian wines at the LCBO and allowing the sale of local wines outside the LCBO;
 2. Modify the definition of key hydrologic feature to distinguish between man-made and naturally formed features, and utilize Niagara Region's Watercourse Mapping Update to determine appropriate setback provisions from key hydrologic features on agricultural lands within the Greenbelt.
 - Requiring the purchase of local food in broader public sector procurement.
 3. Support the agricultural products produced in the Greenbelt by:
 - Investing in the infrastructure of food production and distribution such as irrigation systems, processing plants, freezing facilities, and distribution centres;
 - Expanding promotion for Greenbelt products (through highway signage, tourism materials, etc);
 - Changing related Provincial policies, for example,
 4. Expand and strengthen the value-added farming activities policies in the Plan to provide greater clarity on the range, scale and parameters for value-added agricultural uses on agricultural lands (use the Regional policies, RPPA 6-2009, as a basis for these).
 - Support the development of Rural Community Improvement Plans to support agricultural communities in the Greenbelt.
 5. Establish programs to support and encourage the next generation of farmers: programs that could attract farmers to the Greenbelt and/or help new and young farmers with start-up costs.
 6. Provide financial support to farmers/the agricultural industry. This support could take the form of:
 - Investment in farm-related infrastructure which would assist growers with production and getting their product to market (irrigation systems, processing, distribution, etc);
- Incentives which could include:
 - Ecological Goods and Services programs;
 - Incentives for adopting new technologies or sustainable farming advancements;
 - Purchase of conservation easements;
 - Targeted tax relief programs to encourage new farmers or support senior, fixed income farmers;
 - Establishing a dedicated percentage of tax revenues from agriculture/food sources that is channeled back into supporting agriculture.

6.3 Provide for Complete Communities

Summary

Opportunities were identified to refine Greenbelt policies to ensure complete communities with the ability to grow and **provide community, emergency, recreational, and health services** to meet existing and future needs. There must be **flexibility to appropriately locate these services and facilities** to serve the community most efficiently.

The Plan must allow for the provision of **a balance of live/work opportunities** within Greenbelt communities so that municipalities remain fiscally healthy and residents are not forced to travel long distances to get to work. There is particular concern about **retaining and enhancing employment uses within Greenbelt communities**. Business owners are anxious that the Greenbelt Plan allow them to expand their operations within their site or onto adjacent properties, and in doing so provide more jobs to the community.

Greenbelt municipalities stress that it is important for them to **grow and diversify their tax bases** to remain financially sustainable. In several municipalities there is an interest in **refining Greenbelt boundaries or expanding settlement areas to accommodate growth and**

facilitate complete communities, perhaps through a municipal comprehensive review process.

Participants made the point that **a complete agricultural community is not the same as a complete urban community**. Businesses that support agriculture such as tractor services and farm implement dealerships must be able to locate within farming communities. Furthermore, **Niagara needs to look at its growth at a regional level**; every municipality will not be able to grow in the same way and provide the same amenities.

The Greenbelt Plan must not only be about preserving agricultural lands. **It must provide a framework to allow Niagara communities to grow and thrive.**

What We Heard

The following is a broad capture of the perspectives that were expressed during the consultation (*heard more than once; **heard frequently; ***comment common to almost every session):

- The Greenbelt Plan should allow non-farm businesses that are within the Greenbelt to grow and provide more jobs **
- The Greenbelt Plan should not just be about farming – it must also protect businesses *
- The expansion of non-agricultural uses (legal and zoned) beyond the existing lot, or within the existing lot which is not zoned entirely for the current use, needs to be considered as permissible to support the viability of businesses or institutional uses
- The Plan needs to have the flexibility to allow municipalities to undertake settlement area expansions to accommodate growth or to facilitate complete communities when necessary – perhaps through a municipal comprehensive review or appeals process *

Provide for Complete Communities

- Consider greater flexibility in the land use policy to accommodate the need for expansions to existing community facilities or location of new facilities *
- We must recognize that what makes a complete agricultural community is different from a complete urban community
- Businesses that support farming should be able to locate in farming communities (tractor services, abattoirs, farm implement dealerships, etc)
- Agriculture-related infrastructure should be located in villages and hamlets for the least conflict
- The rehabilitation of vacant manufacturing properties should be encouraged through incentives
- It is beneficial to keep rural services decentralized; smaller facilities throughout the region provide better accessibility to more people than larger centralized facilities
- Lincoln would like to create a Centre of Excellence in Horticulture to help boost the horticulture industry
- Grimsby wants to expand sports facilities
- Infrastructure upkeep has been a huge financial burden on some municipalities. For example, there are 300 km of roads in Lincoln and 23,000 people while Grimsby has 150km with ~25,000 people.
- The Plan should provide direction/parameters as to where trails should or should not be established
- Niagara should look at its future growth on a regional scale – not every community has to develop in the same way

Provision of emergency services

The Town of Pelham is located within the Greenbelt and Niagara Escarpment Plan area. The Town has identified a need for a new fire hall. If the facility were to be located on the basis of distance to the rural population that it needs to serve, it would have to be within the Greenbelt, however this is not permitted. Municipalities suggested that the Plan should have the flexibility to allow them to address situations like this.

Proposed Changes

1. Define the parameters within which, in order to support complete communities, the regional municipality would be allowed to interpret and determine the appropriate application of Greenbelt policies related to location of community facilities (fire halls, sports fields, medical centres, schools, houses of worship, transit facilities, public works yards) in the Tender Fruit and Grape Area.
2. Allow expansion of businesses and community facilities on existing or potentially onto adjacent lots if it can be demonstrated that the expansion has no impact on agricultural viability or natural heritage features.
3. Provide greater flexibility in permitted uses on vacant sites with legally non-conforming uses as long as they can demonstrate no impact on agricultural viability or natural heritage features.
4. Allow regional municipalities to consider employment area expansions within the Greenbelt as part of a municipal comprehensive review subject to criteria that support the vision and goals of the Greenbelt Plan.

6.4 Ensure a Streamlined Process with Greater Flexibility in Place-Specific Application

Summary

Participants at most consultation sessions thought that the Greenbelt Plan could be improved if there was an **integrated and/or streamlined approach in the application of Greenbelt and related policies** at the Provincial level. **Definitions need to be clarified and made consistent** across different Provincial legislation and plans. The myriad of regulative layers should be removed and a **one-window Greenbelt approach** should be used to provide one point of contact for Greenbelt stakeholders. While many participants felt that having three separate land protection plans in the Greenbelt Plan, Oak Ridges Moraine Plan and Niagara Escarpment Plan was cumbersome, most felt that they performed different functions and should not be integrated. The agricultural community and some other participants strongly opposed the integration of the Plans.

Opportunities to improve the Greenbelt Plan through **better Provincial coordination of policy** at a high level also emerged through the consultation. Participants believe that **there needs to be policy congruency between various arms of the government**, particularly with regards to natural heritage, agricultural, and food

policy. The **Provincial government has many areas of authority where policies should be consistent in promoting the goals of the Greenbelt Plan.**

For example, to ensure that there is a market for the agricultural products that the Greenbelt produces, Provincial food policy should include an emphasis on local food.

One of the most frequently voiced concerns was **that the Greenbelt Plan applies a “one size fits all” approach across a diverse area.** The Tender Fruit and Grape Area in Niagara is distinct from the rest of the Greenbelt in many ways and some Greenbelt policies do not make sense in this context. A priority for consultation participants was to **introduce an element of flexibility into the Greenbelt Plan.** Flexibility is necessary with regards to the **minimum lot size of 40 acres, setback requirements from natural heritage and hydrologic features, naturalization requirements adjacent to farmed lands** and the **policies around severing lots.** There is also a need for **flexibility to change land designations** within the Greenbelt. Participants would like parcels that are currently designated agricultural but where

agriculture is not viable to be able to change designation or merge with an adjacent parcel and take on its designation so that they can be put into productive use. **Lots that have legal non-conforming uses should be able to change designations** as well, as this will not affect the agricultural land base but will allow these lots to remain productive in changing circumstances.

A clear policy is required to **guide the weighing of competing objectives** such as natural heritage protection and aggregate extraction on a case-by-case basis.

Ensure a Streamlined Process with Greater Flexibility in Place-Specific Application

What We Heard

The following is a broad capture of the perspectives that were expressed during the consultation (*heard more than once; **heard frequently; ***comment common to almost every session):

Streamlining the Process

- The Province should develop a system to coordinate policies from different ministries related to development, preservation of agriculture, and protection of natural heritage systems to ensure consistency in policy definitions, intent and boundaries/mapping ***
- There needs to be more clarity and consistency in language around definitions, particularly across different legislation and plans **
- Through the 2015 integrated review, make sure the Niagara Escarpment Plan and Greenbelt Plan are streamlined and there are no conflicting directions or layers **
- The agricultural community is not interested in the integration of the Greenbelt Plan with the Niagara Escarpment Plan or the Oak Ridges Moraine Plan **

- There needs to be policy congruency between different arms of the government, particularly with regard to food policy *
- Introduce inter-governmental and inter-ministerial discussion on issues related to the Greenbelt
- There is a need to ensure that when we try to streamline policies we don't create additional policy layers or conflicts
- Niagara should advocate for a streamlining and simplification of the land use planning system in Ontario

Introducing Flexibility

- The Plan should include policies that address site specific and grandfathered zoning and make it easy to return properties to productive use **
- Re-consider the minimum lot size of 40 acres for farms in specialty crop areas **
 - There needs to be recognition that the small farm sizes in Niagara mean that many Greenbelt policies don't make sense there **

- There should be the flexibility to allow small parcels or parcels where farming is not viable to change their use or merge with adjacent properties and take on their designation *
- There should be flexibility with setbacks and perhaps a study to better understand which natural heritage features have significance **
- There should be a more transparent and accountable process for mapping natural heritage features*
- There should be flexibility with regard to severing land, particularly where there are already multiple houses on a single property *
- Severing lots when there are multiple houses on the property creates long term conflicts
- Are there other options for addressing the issue of multiple houses on one property, such as only taxing the first house as residential and taxing the rest as farm?
- Sometimes approvals for farm help houses restrict severing – this restriction should be maintained

Ensure a Streamlined Process with Greater Flexibility in Place-Specific Application

- Non-agricultural uses should be allowed on Greenbelt sites that have been sitting vacant
- There needs to be a distinction between legally non-conforming uses and illegal uses; flexibility for change in designation should not be given to sites with illegal uses
- Consider applying mixed use approaches utilized in employment lands where split designations cover different parts of the business
- There needs to be clarity around the decision-making process in creating the Plan and any Plan refinements

Proposed Changes

- 1.** Review Provincial policies, plans and legislation for consistency of definitions and intent.
 - Farm size should be taken into consideration in setback requirements;
 - Setback requirements should vary based on the significance of the feature;
- 2.** In creating/amending Provincial policy, plans and legislation, consider consistency with the Greenbelt Plan, for example, by protecting and promoting markets for the food grown in the Greenbelt.
- 3.** Consider opportunities to streamline the Greenbelt Plan and Niagara Escarpment Plan, in particular for properties that lie within or straddle both Plan boundaries. Do not consolidate the two Plans.
- 4.** Given the small farm sizes in Niagara Region, during the Greenbelt review process consult with stakeholders on a revised minimum lot size in the Tender Fruit and Grape Area.
- 5.** Introduce flexibility in municipal interpretation or application with regard to the following policies of the Greenbelt Plan:
 - Setback requirements:
 - Setback requirements should be different in the Tender Fruit and Grape Area;
 - Severing lots when there are multiple houses on a single property (except when the approval of a house prohibited future severing);
 - Changes of designation for:
 - Parcels where agriculture is not viable;
 - Legal non-conforming uses.

6.5 Enhance Education and Awareness about the Distinct Nature of Niagara and its Contribution within the Greenbelt

Summary

Consultation participants suggested that many of the problems they have experienced with the Greenbelt Plan have been the result of a lack of awareness on the part of Provincial staff about the distinct nature of Niagara within the Greenbelt. They believe that the Greenbelt takes a "one size fits all" approach that does not work for Niagara's unique circumstances. With its **irreplaceable combination of soil and microclimate**, Niagara Region contains 90% of the Province's grape and tender fruit lands. **Farm sizes in the region are, on average, much smaller than elsewhere in the province**, particularly in those municipalities included in the Greenbelt (see sidebar). In addition, Niagara is distinct from most other regions in the Greenbelt because of the **value of agriculture to its economy**. Unlike other regions, Niagara is primarily a food producing place. All these distinctions **heighten the consequences of the Greenbelt Plan for Niagara**. Participants often reiterated that the **Greenbelt tries to promote an idealized form of agriculture**, but in reality farming is an industrial operation. To improve the Greenbelt Plan there needs to be **enhanced education and awareness among Provincial staff** about the realities of farming in Niagara and the importance of a viable agricultural industry in the Greenbelt.

Education and awareness needs to be improved between the Province and farmers in both directions. Not only do farmers feel that the Province does not understand their concerns, in many cases they also **do not understand how the Greenbelt Plan works and how it applies to their land**. One suggestion was that **a simplified and streamlined summary of the Greenbelt Plan should be posted on the internet** to make it clear to landowners exactly what they can and cannot do with their property.

There also needs to be **better public education about the Greenbelt**, so that tourists can appreciate and understand its function and enjoy the greenspace that it provides in a respectful way. Enhanced outreach is required to **inform people of how they can access the trail system** and how to use it without disturbing adjacent farms. Messaging needs to be improved to **make it clear that the Greenbelt is not public land**.

Participants had a number of ideas of how to improve public awareness about agriculture and the Greenbelt. They felt that **agriculture and food should be part of the school curriculum**. It was also suggested that **public advertisements and promotional materials could be used to increase awareness**.

Farm sizes in Niagara Region

In the Greenbelt Plan, the minimum required lot size after severing in specialty crop areas is 40 acres. Consultation participants felt strongly that this does not make sense, because the average farm operation size in Niagara Region is 104 acres, considerably smaller than the Ontario average of 233 acres or the Southern Ontario average of 211 acres. In most Greenbelt municipalities the average is even smaller, due to the nature of tender fruit and greenhouse production.

Municipality	Average farm operation size (acres)
West Lincoln	156
Pelham	87
Thorold	220
Niagara-on-the-Lake	54 ¹
St. Catharines	44 ²
Lincoln	60
Grimsby	71

Source: An Update to the Regional Municipality of Niagara Agricultural Economic Impact Study (2003), Niagara Region, August 2010

¹ According to the Niagara-on-the-Lake Agricultural Advisory Committee 75% of farms in Niagara-on-the-Lake are under 25 acres

² According to St. Catharines staff the average farm lot size in St. Catharines is approximately 20 acres

Enhance Education and Awareness about the Distinct Nature of Niagara and its Contribution within the Greenbelt

What We Heard

The following is a broad capture of the perspectives that were expressed during the consultation (*heard more than once; **heard frequently; ***comment common to almost every session):

- Provincial staff need to understand the realities of farming **
 - Compose a panel of farm leaders to explain to the Province how Greenbelt policies negatively affect best farming practices
 - Increase awareness of the best management practices already being undertaken by farmers and their role as stewards of the land
 - There must be recognition that the combination of soils and microclimate cannot be replaced
 - There must be recognition that Niagara contains 90% of Ontario's grape and tender fruit lands
 - People need to be shown how easy it is for a farm to turn into an unproductive operation because of too many restrictions
 - Educate Provincial staff about the negative impacts of trail construction adjacent to farms
- Introduce programs where people can come and work on a working farm to really understand the challenges
- Explain to everyone that a Greenbelt is not a perfect solution
- There needs to be more education for residents and farmers on the impacts of Greenbelt Plan policies
- Communication needs to be improved between the Province and farmers; many farmers do not understand why they cannot sever their land or make certain alterations *
- Consider producing a simplified and streamlined summary of the Greenbelt Plan that tells people exactly what they can or can't do and posting it on the internet
- There needs to be increased public awareness of the fact that when farmland is located adjacent to existing or restored natural heritage systems increased spraying of pesticides by farmers is often required
- Change the "Entering the Greenbelt" signs to "Scenery provided by Farmers/Growers" so that people understand that it is private land *
- Promotion of the Bruce Trail in Niagara Region needs to be increased (perhaps on Provincial website) and there needs to be more awareness of how the Bruce Trail can be accessed
- Consider providing literature related to the Greenbelt through Bruce Trail materials (should provide maps that detail natural features within the Greenbelt)
- Use advertising to ensure the public is better informed about the realities and importance of farming
- Educate children about the Greenbelt Plan and importance of locally grown food through the school curriculum
- There is a need to understand the emotional toll on farmers when their contributions to an important economic driver (agriculture) are not valued or rewarded financially
- Niagara should be recognized as a special region and there should be a minister in charge of Niagara and a strategy for the prosperity of Niagara

Enhance Education and Awareness about the Distinct Nature of Niagara and its Contribution within the Greenbelt

Proposed Changes

1. Enhance education and awareness at the Province about the distinct nature of farming in Niagara to recognize:
 - The diversity of farming in Ontario, including differences in commodity sectors, farm practices and farm sizes, especially in specialty crop areas;
 - The important role of farmers in the Greenbelt (including the employment they provide);
 - The value of the best management practices that farmers use; and
 - The environmental benefits of farmed land including wildlife corridors and habitat that is provided by permanently cropped land.
2. Initiate regular meetings between Greenbelt Plan stakeholders and affected landowners to discuss key issues and opportunities to address these issues and to create partnerships;
 - Stakeholders include:
 - Provincial staff from the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, the Ministry of Natural Resources, and the Ministry of Agriculture and Food;
 - Municipal and Regional staff;
 - Farmers from throughout the Greenbelt and Niagara in particular;
 - Members of recreational organizations; and
 - Members of the public.
 - How to respect farmers' land while enjoying recreational activities;
3. Create a how-to guide for navigating the regulatory framework when your property is in the Greenbelt.
4. Increase public awareness and promotion of the Greenbelt:
 - It should include messaging about the Greenbelt's agricultural contribution, including:
 - Greenbelt farmers' role in feeding cities;
 - More information should be provided on accessing trails, cultural heritage sites and conservation areas in the Greenbelt;
 - Expand the Wine Route initiative to include local food producers or create a local food route/trail without adversely affecting agricultural viability.

6.6 Establish an Improved Process for Determining Boundaries

Summary

Participants expressed the desire for a **comprehensive approach to determining Greenbelt boundaries. An improved methodology is needed for determining all Greenbelt boundaries** – the overall Greenbelt Plan boundary, the boundary of Settlement Areas (generally called Urban Areas in municipal official plans), and the boundary of the Natural Heritage System. Boundaries must **reflect existing land parcels** and should consider the **existing use of the properties that are included**. There should be **a clear rationale for including properties in the Protected Countryside** that includes their agricultural viability, particularly for properties bordering the Settlement Area. It is also important that **municipal servicing is taken into consideration in determining the boundary of the Settlement Area**. Services often go down the middle of a road, therefore, where this occurs, lots on both sides should be included in the Settlement Area in order to make best use of an existing municipal investment.

The **determination and refinement of boundaries must be transparent**, with a process in place for municipalities and individuals to **appeal boundaries on**

a case-by-case basis. Municipalities suggested that they could use a **municipal comprehensive review process** to do Settlement Area expansions to accommodate growth or facilitate complete communities. There was also interest in creating a **process for land swapping** to allow municipalities to remove lands that are suitable for development from the Protected Countryside in exchange for lands that are not within the Protected Countryside and are prime for protection.

What We Heard

The following is a broad capture of the perspectives that were expressed during the consultation (*heard more than once; **heard frequently; ***comment common to almost every session):

- There is a need to reassess the boundary of the Greenbelt more frequently than 10 years *
- There should be clear methodology for determining Greenbelt boundaries *
- The Plan needs to have the flexibility to allow municipalities to consider Settlement Area expansions to accommodate growth or to facilitate complete communities when necessary – perhaps through a municipal comprehensive review or appeals process *
- There needs to be flexibility to allow growth in areas where infrastructure investments have already been made *
- Physical features such as ravines, hydro corridors, railway corridors and major 400 series highways make better boundaries than local and regional roads because those features are often the end of the line for urban services as well

Establish an Improved Process for Determining Boundaries

- Include lots on both sides of serviced local and regional roads within the Settlement Area; using these roads as the boundary of the Settlement Area should be avoided
- Greenbelt boundary refinements should not impact the ability to create employment areas and employment expansion considerations should not be grouped in with residential development
- There should be a planning process to review case-by-case situations for refinement
- Municipalities should be allowed to take properties out of the Greenbelt in exchange for properties/areas in other parts of the region that are prime candidates for Greenbelt protection
- The agricultural viability of parcels needs to be a component of considerations of boundary refinements
- Farmed land should not be included within the boundary of the Natural Heritage System
- Greenbelt boundaries need to reflect existing land parcels

- Consider releasing non-agricultural land within the Greenbelt boundaries from the restrictions of the Greenbelt Plan
- During the consultation, many examples were identified of sites in Niagara where there are questions around the rationale for the determination of the Greenbelt boundary. The following is a list of these sites:

Grimsby

- In West Grimsby, north of the Niagara Escarpment and west of Casablanca Boulevard, there is some land that the Town believes would be ideal for transit-oriented development due to its proximity to an existing GO Transit carpool lot and the site of a GO Rail station planned as part of GO Transit's expansion into Niagara Region. The land is not prime agricultural land but cannot be developed because it is included within the Protected Countryside. Grimsby also contains a provincially significant wetland which is currently outside of Greenbelt protection.

Lake Gibson (Thorold)

- In Thorold, land has been identified in the Lake Gibson area which could be considered for inclusion in the Greenbelt as an addition to the existing Short Hills Provincial Park.

First Street Louth (St. Catharines)

- First Street Louth in St. Catharines is a partially serviced street with a mixture of uses along both sides, including commercial. South of the CN Railway line, the Settlement Area boundary goes along First Street Louth until St. Paul St. West and then continues along the backs of the lots on the east side of the street. Since the street has some servicing and there are existing non-agricultural uses along it, participants questioned why the lots on both sides of First Street Louth were not included along the entire length of the Settlement Area.

Establish an Improved Process for Determining Boundaries

Hospital Lands (St. Catharines)

- The area surrounding the new St. Catharines hospital at Fourth Ave and First Street Louth is a logical location for growth in jobs and medical-related services over the long term. While the land east and west of the hospital site is within the Settlement Area and has been dedicated for employment uses, the land to the north and south of the site is part of the Protected Countryside.

Rice Road (Pelham)

- Rice Road in the Town of Pelham, which is located on the east side of the Fonthill Settlement Area, is an example of where the Greenbelt has prevented the efficient use of pre-existing infrastructure. Servicing runs down the middle of the road, but farmers on the east side have not been allowed to hook up to it because they are in the Greenbelt.

Twenty Mile Creek

- Environmental stakeholders suggested that it would be appropriate and consistent with the Greenbelt Plan's objectives to extend the boundary to include all of Twenty Mile Creek.

Other examples

- Certain individual properties where the rationale for inclusion in the Greenbelt was questioned were also identified. These included a driving range on Third Street and a vacant farm parcel on First Street in St. Catharines.



Greenbelt surrounding new hospital, St. Catharines

Establish an Improved Process for Determining Boundaries

Proposed Changes

1. Refine the methodology for determining Greenbelt boundaries and ensure consideration is given to:
 - Agricultural viability of parcels when determining their inclusion in the Protected Countryside;
 - Agricultural use of parcels when determining their inclusion or exclusion from the Natural Heritage System;
 - Delineation of existing land parcels;
 - Existing municipal servicing when determining the boundary of the Settlement Area;
 - A comprehensive review process which contemplates local and regional Greenbelt and growth management objectives.
 2. Reassess the boundary more often than the 10 year Greenbelt Plan review;
 - Establish an appeals process to review candidates for boundary refinements on a case-by-case basis;
- Establish a process to allow regional municipalities to assess Settlement Area expansions;
 - This could be a municipal comprehensive review process;
 - Employment area expansions may be considered separately from residential expansions;
 - Establish parameters to exchange land within the Protected Countryside for land that is not currently within the Protected Countryside on a net loss basis.



8th Avenue, St. Catharines

7 Greatest Opportunities to Effect Change

Niagara Region's Greenbelt Review process has provided a wealth of input on the community's experience with the Greenbelt to date. Participants were passionate, concerned and committed to expressing their opinions and suggestions for change to the Greenbelt Plan. The previous sections of this report document the full range of perspectives and the many ideas expressed during the review process. **Based on the emphasis in the community comments, our knowledge of the Greenbelt Plan and other provincial directions, and our professional assessment of opportunities that may have the best chance for effecting changes meaningful for Niagara in the Greenbelt Plan Review, Urban Strategies has identified the following ten greatest opportunities for effecting**

change to the Greenbelt Plan through the review process. This section builds on all the comments and ideas recorded earlier in the document.

Our team recommends that Niagara Region consider the following 10 opportunities for change as priorities in discussions and submissions to the Province with regard to the Greenbelt Review. Many of these opportunities relate to more than one of the actions identified in Section 6 and, for information, have been cross referenced (in brackets) in this section.

- 1. Use the key outcomes from Niagara's Greenbelt Review process as the foundation and basis for immediate discussion between Niagara Region and the Province.** (6.1.6) Given the tone of urgency and importance in addressing the issues identified through this consultation process, Niagara Region is encouraged to find opportunities to engage the Province in discussions about the Greenbelt and, in particular, agricultural viability in Niagara in advance of the 2015 review process through Niagara Week and on a sustained basis.
- 2. Recognizing that the microclimate and soil conditions create an irreplaceable resource in Niagara, prioritize agricultural viability as an objective over other Greenbelt objectives for lands within the Niagara Peninsula Tender Fruit and Grape Area.** (6.2.1)
- 3. Recognizing the distinct character of the agriculture industry and farming community in Niagara, provide for greater flexibility in application of Greenbelt policies.** (6.1.5, 6.3.1, 6.3.2, 6.3.3, 6.4.5) More specifically, define the parameters within which, in order to support

agricultural viability and complete urban and rural communities, regional municipalities would be allowed to interpret and determine the locally appropriate application of certain Greenbelt policies, including: mapping of and setbacks from key natural heritage and hydrologic features, naturalized restoration requirements adjacent to farmed crops, legally non-conforming land uses, expansion of businesses/ community facilities onto adjacent lots, provision of community facilities, and severances related to surplus farm dwellings.

4. Recognizing the distinct nature of farming in the Tender Fruit and Grape Area, including the small farm parcel sizes and layout of the farming irrigation system, **modify the definition of key hydrologic feature to distinguish between man-made and naturally formed features and utilize Niagara Region's Watercourse Mapping Update to determine appropriate setback provisions from key hydrologic features on agricultural lands within the Greenbelt.** (6.2.2)
5. **Clarify and strengthen Greenbelt Plan policy language** to better articulate or define: the important role of farmers in the Greenbelt, the diversity of agriculture in Ontario, including differences in

commodity sectors, farm practices and farm sizes, the environmental contribution of farmed lands, including the wildlife corridors and habitat provided by permanently cropped land, value-added farming policies, and definitions which conflict with other Provincial policies. (6.2.4, 6.4.1, 6.5.1)

6. **Introduce greater transparency in the Greenbelt Act and Plan implementation by creating a Greenbelt ombudsman role or body that is accessible to municipalities and the broader community.** (6.1.3, 6.1.4, 6.5.2) More specifically,

- The purpose of the body would be to interpret and clarify Greenbelt Plan policies (for example, interpretation of policies or definitions, Natural Heritage System mapping, appropriateness of other uses on existing legally non-conforming sites), encourage dialogue and partnerships between Greenbelt stakeholders and affected landowners, and hear appeals to Greenbelt Plan related decisions;
- This could be an expanded role for the Greenbelt Council or a separate commission;

- There should be diverse representation on this body, including adequate representation from the diverse farming community, particularly in Niagara.

7. **The 2015 Provincial Greenbelt Plan review needs to be transparent, informed, diligent and genuinely open to exploring ways the Plan can be improved to better meet its objectives.** (6.1.1) In structuring the review, the following recommendations should be considered:

- Well in advance of the start of the review, the Province should define and share its intentions regarding the start date for the review, the length of the review, and the process of the review;
- There should be adequate time for municipalities and the public to comment, review amendments, and provide feedback;
- The mechanism for change of the Plan (i.e. changes to all or certain aspects of the Act, the Plan document, related regulations and/or bodies and agencies) should be shared with the public prior to the start of the review;

- The Province should include on the Review Body adequate representation from the diverse farming community across the Greenbelt and in particular from Niagara;
- Specific analyses or consultations on the effectiveness of the Plan should be conducted in terms of economic implications, agricultural viability, ecological value of farmed lands, demographic shifts and sustainability of communities, appropriate minimum lot size in the Niagara Peninsula Tender Fruit and Grape Area, and lessons learned from other jurisdictions;
- Provincial staff should go on site tours with local guides of Greenbelt areas that have been identified as problematic;
- Multimedia tools should be used to ensure broad public input; and
- Ministerial responsibility for the Greenbelt Act/ Plan should be reviewed and consideration given to the prominence and importance of agriculture in the Plan's objectives.

8. Reintroduce ongoing and integrated inter-ministerial working teams to focus on Greenbelt implementation and to increase coordination between ministries on Greenbelt-related initiatives, policies and interpretation. (6.2.3, 6.4.2, 6.5.4) More specifically, this Greenbelt Working Group, consisting of MMAH, OMAF, MOE, MNR and IO would:

- Ensure that Greenbelt policies provide enough flexibility to address unique areas of the province so that the policies do not impact the economic viability of the farm;
- Ensure that Provincial policies do not conflict with but support Greenbelt Plan objectives;
- Coordinate and be responsive to Greenbelt municipalities in terms of interpretation, application and implementation of the Plan;
- Seek ways to advance Greenbelt objectives in terms of initiatives, programs, utilization of existing resources;

- Increase awareness about the range of benefits (employment, ecological and environmental, food health and security, economic) provided by those who live and work in the Greenbelt;
- Facilitate landowner and municipal queries on Greenbelt related matters; and
- Provide technical support to the Greenbelt Council.

9. Signal Provincial commitment to the Greenbelt by introducing a range of financial incentives, coordinated policy directions and tools that would provide support to Greenbelt stakeholders, farmers and the agricultural industry. (6.2.3, 6.2.4, 6.2.5, 6.2.6) This support could take the form of:

- Investment in farm related infrastructure which would assist growers with production and getting their product to market (irrigation systems, processing, distribution, etc);

- Incentives which could include:
 - Ecological Goods and Services programs;
 - Incentives for adopting new technologies or sustainable farming advancements;
 - Purchase of conservation easements;
- Targetted tax relief programs to encourage new, younger or to support senior, fixed income farmers;
- Rural Community Improvement Plans;
- Channeling a dedicated percentage of tax revenues from agriculture/food sources back into supporting agriculture.

10. Ensure clarity in the process by which Greenbelt boundaries will be refined in the 2015 Provincial Greenbelt Plan review. (6.1.1, 6.6.1) More specifically, articulate parameters by which boundary refinements may be considered, for example to support complete communities, optimize existing infrastructure, provide community services, or acknowledge on the ground conditions in Niagara while not compromising the Greenbelt land base or objectives.



Decew Falls, St. Catharines

8 Next Steps

The Niagara Region Greenbelt Review process was informed by a broad range of stakeholders with a diverse range of interests and perspectives on the implementation of the Province of Ontario's Greenbelt Plan. The high level of participation in the project is an indication of the importance of ensuring that the Greenbelt Plan works from Niagara's perspective.

The proactive approach undertaken to develop this report was carried out to ensure that the Niagara perspective on what is working, what is not working, and opportunities for improvement with respect to Greenbelt Plan implementation is taken into consideration by the Province of Ontario. Niagara Region is optimistic that the changes suggested through this report will be reflected in the next iteration of the Greenbelt Plan.

Updating the Greenbelt Plan is the responsibility of the Province of Ontario. The Greenbelt Plan was created by the Province of Ontario under the Greenbelt Act (2005). Section 10 of the Greenbelt Act (2005) sets out requirements for regular reviews of the Plan, legislating that the Province must undertake a review of the Greenbelt Plan every 10 years. 2015 will be the first review of the Greenbelt Plan since its inception.

This report will be submitted to the Province of Ontario the year prior to the legislated review of the Greenbelt Plan. Niagara Region wants to be certain that the voice of the stakeholders and community is heard, and can be used as a catalyst to shape the format of the Province's review process.

Through resolution dated September 19, 2013, the Council of Niagara Region endorsed this report and made a commitment to ensure that a Niagara perspective on the range of benefits, challenges and opportunities related to Greenbelt implementation is reflected in the next version of the Greenbelt Plan.



13th Street, Lincoln

Appendix A: Niagara Greenbelt Review Key Events and Submissions

The efforts and input of everyone who participated during Niagara Region's Greenbelt Review process was valued and greatly appreciated. The following provides an outline of key events and submissions.

Consultation Round One

Over 200 individuals participated in person during the Round One consultation events from February 25-28, 2013. The following sessions were held:

Focus groups:

- Agriculture (2)
- Planning
- Natural Heritage
- Development and Natural Resources
- Economic Development/Tourism

Community meeting (February 26)

Interviews with elected officials

Consultation Round Two

Over 100 individuals participated in person during the Round Two consultation events from April 2-4, 2013. The following sessions were held:

- 4 focus groups (mixed stakeholders)
- Community meeting (April 3)
- Interviews with elected officials

Submissions

The following submissions were received during the Niagara Greenbelt Review consultation process:

Letters/emails from:

- Grape Growers of Ontario
- Ontario Tender Fruit Producers
- Niagara-on-the-Lake Agricultural Task Force
- Rankin Construction Inc.
- Walker Aggregates Inc.
- John Ariens/ George T. Zajac
- Les High
- Michael Maund
- Submission packages with detailed documentation from Austin Kirkby (2)

Workbooks:

- 16 Workbooks from Round One
- 10 Workbooks from Round Two

63 online surveys

Project Website: <http://www.niagararegion.ca/government/planning/greenbelt-engagement.aspx>