

**Policies and Proposals for the
National Capital Greenbelt Master Plan Review**

Ottawa Field-Naturalists' Club¹

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Executive Summary

We present reasons why the National Capital Greenbelt should be preserved as undeveloped natural green space and agricultural land, and present recommendations to enhance these roles.

Environmental values revolve around continuity. While there are many specific ecological gems within the Greenbelt, the values provided by a large unbroken area of undeveloped land is just as important as the intrinsic value of the “gems” considered in isolation. Natural land and its wildlife generally benefit from being “left alone”, so in advocating that we don’t have to write a book. On the other hand, agriculture inherently consists of interfering with nature, and the effects on the continuity of the Greenbelt can be harmful. Buildings, parking lots and roads disrupt ecological continuity even more. In short, more can be done to help nature by reforming agriculture, and prohibiting further roads and buildings, than by trying (often ineffectually) to help nature in natural areas. Therefore, we devote as much attention to these areas of the Greenbelt as to the natural lands.

In terms of human health, the Greenbelt acts as a clean air reservoir that provides Ottawa with important air quality benefits, especially during smog conditions.

Our approach to agriculture extends beyond that presented in the 1966 Master Plan, which presents Greenbelt agriculture as symbolic of a Canada that was mainly agricultural. We do not dwell upon the concept of Greenbelt as “Rural Landscape”. In the future, Greenbelt agriculture will become increasingly important as fossil fuel depletion (and measures to reduce human-induced climate change) force changes to existing farming and food distribution practices. Also, there is ample evidence that existing agricultural practices are getting the entire world into trouble. Problems with insect pollinators is just one example. The Greenbelt provides an opportunity to sponsor more sustainable forms of agriculture, that are often hindered by the brutal demands placed on farmers to be competitive. Public ownership of the land makes this approach more feasible. Agriculture should not be a “killing ground” for migratory birds, especially those that nest on the ground, and are now typically in steep decline.

Recreational uses of the Greenbelt are important, and may become increasingly so in a future of energy scarcity, if travel to more distant recreational destinations becomes less affordable. The Greenbelt can contribute more than it presently does to the quality of life in the National Capital Region, although it should remain a relatively quiet haven of relief from the noise and pollution of city life. The recreational trail system in the Greenbelt should be extended into closer proximity to farming operations. That doing this is perfectly practical (as well as educational) is shown by three examples: the Waskahegan trail system around Edmonton, Alberta, the Rideau Trail system connecting Kingston and Ottawa, and the historic system of Public Footpaths (rights of way) in Britain.

Built facilities are undesirable, because as surrounding areas become increasingly urbanized, there is a need to differentiate the Greenbelt by making sure that it stays (and becomes increasingly) green.

In our discussion of buildings and infrastructure, we refute the view that urban intensification is hampered by the existence of the Greenbelt.

Infrastructure could be an issue since the City of Ottawa has suggested that the cost of the infrastructure linking communities via existing corridors (roads) through the Greenbelt would justify development along those corridors. We provide reasons why these views are invalid, or greatly exaggerated, and fully compensated by the overwhelming advantages of maintaining the Greenbelt undeveloped.

Finally, we propose that Greenbelt land should have clearly-defined boundaries protected by federal statute, with commercial and residential development prohibited.

Specific Recommendations

Concerning Built Facilities

- No further use of the Greenbelt for buildings or infrastructure should be allowed. The next Greenbelt Master Plan should not designate any undeveloped land as a “Buildable Site Area”.
- This should apply to undeveloped land currently under the control of the Airport Authority. This land, part of the historic Leitrim Wetland, should be protected.
- Existing built sites in the Greenbelt, such as government buildings in some areas, should be phased out when possible.
- Unless negative environmental effects are resolved, wind energy operations should not be permitted.
- Recreational facilities, such as equestrian arenas and soccer pitches, should be located outside the Greenbelt.

Concerning Agriculture

- Preference should be given to organic farming techniques.
- Mixed farming should be encouraged. In particular, integrated systems that rotate animals through pastures should be encouraged.

- Hay operations should use practices such as delayed cutting (to protect ground nests) and mowing hay from the centre of the field outward (to allow fledglings to escape).
- Additional hedgerows should be introduced, to divide some land into smaller fields. This would help migratory song birds.
- Biofuel crops uses heavy inputs of petroleum-based fertilizers and pesticides, and should be discouraged.
- Agro-tourism, including school and educational tours should be encouraged in order to raise awareness of agriculture in the Greenbelt. Recreational trails could be routed closer to farms, in order to familiarize residents with Greenbelt agriculture.
- Opportunities for converting unused farmland to allotment and community gardens should be explored.

Other

- Greenbelt land should have clearly-defined boundaries protected by federal statute, preventing commercial and residential development and other incompatible activities.
- Programs to control invasive species should be introduced. To be practical and effective, such programs will need to elicit help from volunteers, which has not been favoured in past NCC policy.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The Ottawa Field-Naturalists' Club² welcomes the review by the National Capital Commission of the Greenbelt Master Plan. We take this opportunity to present our views on the Greenbelt, and make recommendations for the next Master Plan.

The Greenbelt is a remarkable feature of the National Capital Region, with a diversity of significant natural, agricultural, forest and heritage land areas and landscapes. It contributes not only to the image and quality of life of Canada's capital region but also to the City of Ottawa's declared policy: "to create a green and environmentally sensitive city."

The National Capital Greenbelt was created on the basis of recommendations in the Gréber Report, completed and submitted to the Mackenzie King government in November 1949. But it was not until June 18, 1958, that Prime Minister John Diefenbaker announced that his government would make funds available to the Federal District Commission (the NCC's predecessor) to purchase land in the National Capital Region for the creation of a Greenbelt.

Although expropriated owners received what were deemed to be fair Markey prices, this ended many farming careers.

As a result, the Greenbelt is almost entirely federally-owned, unlike some other designated Greenbelts such as the Greater Toronto Area Greenbelt, where the designation did not change the land ownership.

For three decades, successive federal governments maintained the sanctity of the Greenbelt, insofar as it was not treated as a land bank for local municipalities or commercial interests. The National Capital Act placed restrictions on the NCC's ability to make land transactions, requiring Governor-in-Council approval for disposals above \$10,000, in accordance with the Financial Administration Act and Regulations. Also, proceeds from any sale of lands were turned over to the Receiver General of Canada.

² Founded in 1879, the Ottawa Field-Naturalists' Club is the oldest natural history club in Canada. Over 800 members have interests in all aspects of the natural world, from birding to botanizing, investigation to publication, conservation to cooperation.

OUR OBJECTIVES

- To promote the appreciation, preservation, and conservation of Canada's natural heritage
- To encourage investigation, publish the results of research in all fields of natural history, and diffuse the information as widely as possible
- To support and cooperate with organizations engaged in preserving, maintaining or restoring environments of high quality for living things.

In 1988 however, the National Capital Act was amended, allowing the NCC to keep the proceeds of land sales. In addition, the NCC's budget was cut, forcing the NCC to sell some federal lands to help make up its budgetary shortfalls. Greenbelt land has been sold primarily for infrastructure development (roads etc.) but also, as in the case of Nortel, for commercial buildings

The pressure to develop the Greenbelt continues. During 2008, proposals for assigning parts of the Greenbelt to residential and other development were publicly advanced, first in an apparently casual remark by the NCC Chairperson, and shortly afterwards, by the City of Ottawa in a White Paper (WP) with the title "Development in the Greenbelt³."

Currently, a trade show centre is being built at the Ottawa Airport. This development is taking place on a wetland supposedly protected by federal wetlands policy, and when the NCC had proclaimed a moratorium on development in the Greenbelt while the Master Plan Review was taking place

Despite these ongoing development pressures, and the lack of any effective framework of legal protection, the Greenbelt continues, and in fact is thriving.

1.2 The Review of the Greenbelt Master Plan

The 1996 Greenbelt Master Plan defined three major roles for the Greenbelt, each with an accompanying set of land designations:

Continuous Natural Environment

- Core Natural Area
- Natural Buffer
- Natural Area Link

Vibrant Rural Community

- Cultivated Landscape
- Rural Landscape

Compatible Built Facilities

- Buildable Site Area
- Infrastructure Corridor.

³ *Development in the Greenbelt* accessed September 2, 2010 at http://ottawa.ca/residents/public_consult/beyond_2020/papers/white/development2_en.html .

Although City staff claimed that this WP merely examined some options, the presentation was biased, giving prominence to arguments for development, while presenting only a token examination of reasons for not doing this. Although the NCC is not bound by the City's position, it does have a duty to consult widely, including with the City. Consequently, and bearing in mind the prior comment by the NCC Chairperson, in the following we discuss some aspects of the WP.

These three major roles were presented as though the justifications for each of them were obvious, but for such fundamental issues, each identified role needs to be closely examined. This is especially true in light of the many environmental, economic and social changes that have occurred since the 1996 Master Plan.

We propose that the “natural environment” role provide the guiding principle for the entire Greenbelt.

The role of “vibrant rural community” in current practice simply refers to the use of a considerable amount of the Greenbelt for farming, and some forestry. This role should continue, but modified to encourage sustainable farming that is compatible with the natural environment role.

The “compatible built facilities” role, on the other hand, is incompatible with the natural environment role and no further use of the Greenbelt for buildings or infrastructure should be allowed.

In the following pages, we address these subjects, under the general headings of natural environment, agriculture and built facilities.

2 NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

2.1 Ecological continuity

Environmental values revolve around ecological continuity. Continuity provides migration corridors, which allow native flora and fauna to regenerate after population decline, whether caused by natural effects such as seasonal changes or by disease, human actions, or combinations of these.

The Greenbelt’s areas of highest value, including Mer Bleue, Green’s Creek, Medeola Woods, Stony Swamp and Shirleys Bay are ecologically linked together by undeveloped greenspace, including wetlands. Such lands should not be considered to have lower value merely because they lack the biological richness of the major identified lands — the ecological integrity provided by a large unbroken area of undeveloped land is just as important as the intrinsic value of the most important areas considered in isolation.

The ecological benefits of the Greenbelt extend well beyond its boundaries, particularly where wildlife corridors connect with other regional natural areas. Pollination by wild insects benefits agriculture and ordinary backyard gardens, for example. In this respect, NCC policy should support agricultural practices that do not harm wildlife that crosses from natural areas to farmed areas.

2.2 Ecological services for Ottawa residents

The manner in which the Greenbelt spaces out the communities of amalgamated Ottawa provides air quality benefits. Clean air is carried to the city by the continental winds, but as is well known, Ottawa experiences temperature inversions. Air quality deteriorates, but the Greenbelt provides a reservoir of clean air, helping to preserve Ottawa's air quality during these adverse conditions.

The Greenbelt also provides hydrological services. Rain water is retained instead of going immediately into storm sewers, thereby reducing flood risks.

Finally, the Greenbelt serves to moderate temperatures within the Greenbelt, by surrounding the urban heat island with green space between it and the suburbs. While the effect has not been quantified in Ottawa, it almost certainly operates, providing us with cooler nights during the dog days of summer.

2.3 Invasive species in natural areas

Recent NCC policy has been that natural lands disturbed by previous farming, tree planting or other uses should be allowed to revert to nature without intervention. However, much of this land is being adversely affected by the spread of invasive alien plant species such as Swallowwort, Garlic Mustard and Buckthorn. The result has been major displacement of native shrubs such as Hawthorn, Choke Cherry and Staghorn Sumac, and hindrance to the regeneration of forest trees in some areas. In a June 4, 2009 document entitled "NCC Environmental Strategy - A framework for environmental leadership in Canada's Capital", the NCC lists as an objective: "Amount of NCC urban land infested by aggressive invasive plant species will be reduced by 10% against a baseline by 2014."

We agree that programs to control invasive species should be introduced. To be practical and effective, such programs will need to elicit help from volunteers, which has not been favoured in past NCC policy. However, there are precedents for engaging volunteers to control invasive plants. For example, in 2008, volunteers assisted in an Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources program for the control of Water Chestnut (*Trapa natans*) on the Ottawa River in Voyageur Provincial Park. Another parallel (involving cutting of trees greater in size than Buckthorn trees) is the use of volunteers to maintain canoe portages in Algonquin Provincial Park. And, following the major ice storm in 1998, the NCC had help from volunteers in clearing Gatineau Park ski trails. Clearly, the legal and other issues involving volunteers in this type of activity have been successfully addressed before.

3 AGRICULTURE

Present agricultural practices in the Greenbelt are, generally speaking, commercially successful and appropriate by existing standards, providing food, employment and income. However, for some time there have been trends towards reforming agricultural practices throughout Ontario, and in fact, world-wide. Reforms are happening as a result of various pressures and stresses, including: ecological factors such as soil degradation and pollination issues, climate change, energy shortages, and other threats. A revitalized Master Plan can position Greenbelt farming as a positive influence in this process. Comments from farm tenants include suggestions supporting our own views on creating a better future for Greenbelt agriculture. Obviously, farming tenants need market conditions that allow them to stay in business. Longer leases would help, but these should be coupled with requirements for some changes, as we indicate below.

Much of the world's farmland has been described as an "ecological desert" as a consequence of monoculture crop production based on fertilizers and pesticides. While this trend extended world-wide and was praised as the "green revolution" that would (but did not) end world hunger, its ecological effects and long-term economic impacts were slow to be acknowledged. In the short and medium term, farmers made a better living, even while food prices came down in real terms. However, there are many negative effects caused by monoculture production of crops such as corn:

- soil degradation due to loss of beneficial organisms and humus;
- declining populations of wild bees and other insect pollinators;
- destruction of other useful or non-harmful insect life;
- population decline of insectivorous wild species - birds, bats and other mammals;
- dependence on cheap fuel for farm machinery;
- dependence on petroleum products as fertilizers and pesticides.

Declining populations of wild insect pollinators are a warning to the farming community that all is not well in agriculture. So far, populations of wild bees and other pollinators appear to remain healthy in natural land areas of the Greenbelt and no doubt assist in pollination of adjacent food crops that need them. In contrast, over much of North America, farm crops are beginning to suffer from catastrophic declines in domestic (mechanically transported) bee populations on which they have become reliant. Pollination is just one issue on which the Greenbelt can set an example.

NCC policies could similarly encourage improved practices for raising livestock. Industrial beef, hog and chicken operations are now known to create problems such as:

- pollution of water supplies by manure;
- development of pathogens resistant to antibiotics; and
- ethical issues arising from over-crowding.

Greenbelt agriculture should set examples that farm operations elsewhere can adopt. As many farm tenants have suggested, the NCC should encourage increased food production for local markets, requiring less transportation energy, and as a result, creating less pollution.

An additional reason for recommending agricultural reform along these lines is that the southern areas of the Greenbelt, which are largely dedicated to agriculture, presently in various ways act as a barrier to the ecological continuity we discussed in the previous section. Agricultural lands can be effective ecological linkages if managed properly.

Fears have been expressed that farmers will be unwilling to sign new or renewed leases if new conditions in the leases prevent them from using the most competitive methods. Yet, Greenbelt farming should be pointing a way towards a sustainable future, that farmers elsewhere could (and in future may well be compelled to) adopt. But what reason is there to believe that existing or new tenants will be unwilling to sign? In comments to the Review Team many Greenbelt farm tenants expressed appreciation for their relatively privileged situation, by which some family members work in the city, while other family members work the land. In these tenants own words, farming near a large population centre has its benefits. These benefits act as an effective counter to any perceived reluctance by farm tenants to accept new restrictions and conditions at the time of lease renewals.

3.1 An example: Hay cutting practices

Maintaining habitat for ground-nesting birds, including those protected under the Migratory Birds Convention Act, is becoming a more urgent issue as grassland in the Greenbelt reverts into natural forest. Prior to human settlement, the grassland birds utilized habitat such as burnt forest land, wet meadows and long-grass prairie. As the extensive forested areas and other habitats were replaced by agriculture, the grassland birds continued to flourish, nesting in pasture lands and hayfields. This was possible in hayfields because hay cutting was traditionally done just once a year, allowing birds to raise broods before or after the cut. Present practice, however, is to make two or even three cuts a year. Early cutting of hayfields, while providing higher nutritive value in the hay, also destroys nests, eggs or young of many grassland bird species, including Bobolink, Eastern Meadowlark, Grasshopper Sparrow, Savannah Sparrow, Northern Harrier, Horned Lark, Upland Sandpiper and Common Snipe. The results are catastrophic because these birds are attracted to nest in hayfields, but then fail to reproduce. Many of these migratory birds, and others, are in serious decline for many reasons, but there is no doubt that the ground-nesting birds are seriously impacted by present-day hay cutting practices.

We realise that not cutting hayfields until ground-nesting species have produced a first brood would have significant implications for farmers. Indeed there may be no way to fully protect these bird species without impact on agriculture. However, declines in

migratory bird populations have become so serious that strong efforts must be made. This should be viewed as another opportunity to reform farm practices to permit coexistence with nature, using expert advice from both wildlife specialists and farmers.

The underlying principle for the Greenbelt must be that leaving the protection of ground-nesting birds at the individual discretion of tenants is unsatisfactory. Ultimately, the NCC as a federal agency is responsible for the protection of migratory birds on federal land. Here we offer some suggestions as a starting point.

Farmers should aim for balance between hayfields, pasture and grazing animals in mixed farming operations. Some fields would be used as pasture for livestock early in the season, then left to grow a hay crop, with cutting taking place in late July or early August after the migratory birds have fledged. This would be in contrast to operations where the same fields are used to grow repeated hay crops during each season, and the product is shipped elsewhere to the animal husbandry operation. An attendant advantage, considering future high energy costs, is that mixed farming is less energy-intensive, and should be encouraged by conditions attached to farm leases.

Additional hedgerows should be introduced, to divide some land into smaller fields. This would help migratory song birds.

3.2 Energy production

Some farm tenants propose alternative energy production (wind, solar, ethanol) in the Greenbelt for economic benefit. Other tenants evidently oppose this, declaring that Agricultural lands should not be perceived as a better location for alternative energy than conservation lands. We note that, while there is a need for alternative energy, at the same time all forms of energy production, including the relatively green kinds, can have negative environmental effects. In the case of wind energy, effects of large turbines on wildlife are still in the early stages of being assessed. For example, bats (which are valuable insectivores, but are in decline) have suffered increased mortality rates near wind turbines which are thought to be due to violent air pressure changes near the rotor tips. Unless such negative environmental effects are resolved, wind energy operations should not be permitted. Raising crops for biofuel has been shown to use more energy than is produced; it should not be allowed.

3.3 Equestrian operations

We comment here on equestrian operations, since the NCC public consultation process groups these together with agriculture, even though the end purpose is recreation. We have no objection to suggestions made by tenants for extending equestrian trails between Marlborough Forest, the Greenbelt, and Larose Forest, for a total length of 76 km or more. Also suggested was the construction of an all-season (covered) equestrian arena. Tenants anticipated that a Greenbelt arena would be costly owing to NCC's

requirement to conform to heritage styling. However, an arena could be located outside the Greenbelt. This would still allow a heritage structure to be an option, but would more easily allow private investment, without ruling out public funding support. It would also avoid creating additional infrastructure (access road, services and parking) within the Greenbelt.

3.4 Recreation and farming – resolving conflicts

At present, a substantial proportion of Ottawa residents outside their work hours travel moderate and long distances (evenings and weekends) to lakes and other compelling but distant destinations for recreational purposes. With increasing energy concerns, and decreased opportunity if Ottawa's population continues to increase, Canadian traditions such as "getting away to the cottage" will be less affordable, and out of reach for many residents who presently still have such options.

So, how much should the future Greenbelt contribute to quality of life, including health benefits and recreation? Currently, the Greenbelt's major contribution to recreational opportunities consists of trails through non-agricultural lands. These are justifiably intended for non-motorized travel only. Should additional trails be created? It is useful to consider various negative comments which have been expressed by some agricultural tenants recently, including:

- urbanites don't understand the value of agricultural land;
- the NCC spends too much money building trails instead of maintaining farm assets;
- some cross country skiers, hikers and 4-wheelers routinely trespass; and
- recreational paths located next to farms result in dumping of garbage and trespassing on those farms.

In considering these complaints, it is worth noting that neither the NCC nor the tenants presently offer satisfactory ways for members of the public to discover how farming is done. It is in fact difficult for a member of the public to see what a farm looks like, except for the little that can be seen from fields bordering highways. The "Log Farm" is aimed more at displaying traditional farming rather than modern farming. Both old and new aspects of farming should be better known by the general public.

The present separation between agriculture and the public is largely unnecessary - farm tenants themselves have said that there are opportunities for agro-tourism and youth education, and generally a need to help urban dwellers understand agriculture better. In addition, there are clear precedents for having trails alongside private farmlands with few conflicts. For example, the Waskahegan Trail (commenced in 1967 and managed by a volunteer board) extends for 309Km through and around Edmonton, Alberta, through a mix of public and private land, including much farmland. Landowners are paid nothing. They permit access on the understanding that permission can be withdrawn at any time for any reason.

On a similar basis, the Rideau Trail from Kingston to Ottawa was initially built in 1971, and (in the Association's own words): "crosses terrain ranging from placid farmland to the rugged Canadian Shield. It is only intended for walking (hiking), snowshoeing, and cross-country skiing. ... the continuity of the trail is made possible by the generous permission of both private and public landowners and is enhanced by the existence of a special fund called the Rideau Trail Preservation Fund." Both trail systems are maintained entirely by unpaid volunteers, except for some sections of trail that traverse public land such as parks. (The Rideau Trail traverses the Greenbelt in the Stony Swamp conservation area, but traverses through farmland further south.)

A much earlier example of agriculture operating alongside public use and recreation is the traditional Public Footpath (Rights of Way) network of Great Britain. Appearing in largely unplanned fashion over the centuries and surviving under English Common Law, this network initially provided travel routes more than recreation. This illustrates that recreational pathways and farming can co-exist.

On all these trail systems, where farm property is travelled, there is a clear understanding to do no damage and to "Close the gate after you." This is well honoured by hikers, otherwise the private sections of Canadian trails would have disappeared long ago. It would actually help in public understanding if recreational trails were extended into closer proximity with agriculture. People would see modern farming at work, at virtually no public cost compared to the cost of maintaining the Log Farm.

There are additional opportunities to connect the general public to agriculture, in a positive way. The Greenbelt's agricultural land can be far more than just a place for food production as such. For a society that has come to think of food as growing on supermarket shelves, Greenbelt agriculture could be made more relevant by promoting agro-tourism, including school and educational tours. Again, these are suggestions made by farm tenants, with which we agree. The relative lack of such opportunities at present is in contrast to the vision conveyed in the 1996 Master Plan, which has so far not been implemented.

There are opportunities for introducing allotment and community gardens. While allotment gardens faded away after a brief reappearance in the 1970s, new economic and environmental realities could bring them back. However, since allotment gardens were traditionally located fairly close to the gardeners' homes, it is more of a challenge to foresee how Greenbelt allotments would operate, except for residents already located near the Greenbelt. This is an opportunity to be explored further.

3.5 Recommendations for Agriculture

Mixed farming should be encouraged. In particular, integrated systems that rotate animals through pastures should be encouraged.

Conversely, monoculture crops and industrial-type livestock operations should be discouraged.

Hay operations should use practices such as delayed cutting and mowing hay from the centre of the field outward (to allow fledglings to escape).

Preference should be given to organic farming techniques;

Land should be set aside for hedgerows.

4 BUILT FACILITIES

4.1 Buildings

The “Buildable Site Area” land designation is not acceptable if the Greenbelt is to meet increasing needs for open space continuity. The objectives of this land use designation in the 1996 Master Plan are vague, and presented as though their justifications are obvious. The declared aim was to “... accommodate organizations of capital importance with specialized land needs, such as seclusion or large operational areas ...” (p. 44). This evidently means campus-type research facilities. The idea that “R&D” should be located in seclusion had two components, both of which were current in 1959-61 when land for the original R&D campus in Nepean was acquired by Nortel.

During the early 1990s, while lavish spending remained an option, Nortel greatly expanded its Carling Avenue campus onto an additional 110 acres of Greenbelt. Securing a 99-year lease by a one-time payment to NCC of \$11 million, or \$100,000 per acre, Nortel was able to assist NCC funding. The result was destruction of prime greenspace for the sake of secluded buildings, long wasteful access roads and hidden asphalted parking lots. Describing these as “Compatible Built Facilities” is simply to hide greenspace destruction behind self-serving bafflegab. The inefficiencies extended to public transit - buses follow winding routes that are longer than they need to be, causing service to be slow, costly to local government, and adding to pollution.

There are also government buildings in some areas, and these should be phased out when possible.

The largest built facility in the Greenbelt is undoubtedly the airport. The airport land contains natural wetlands that were included as part of the airport lands in order to provide a buffer zone. They are now regarded by the Airport Authority as buildable land. Extensive natural areas are under threat of development for such things as hotels and exhibition buildings. That should not be permitted; federal policy on the preservation of wetlands⁴ should apply throughout the Greenbelt.

⁴ See *The Federal Policy on Wetland Conservation*, available at <http://dsp-psd.pwgsc.gc.ca/Collection/CW66-116-1991E.pdf>. The Policy includes the following: “The

Unfortunately, a development proposal has emerged that demonstrates that the National Capital Commission is not willing to defend the Greenbelt from development. Wetland is being bulldozed for a trade show centre. This is occurring despite a promise by the NCC that there would be a moratorium on development in the Greenbelt while the Greenbelt Master Plan review was taking place. In fact, the NCC has done the opposite, supporting the right of the Authority to permit the development⁵.

4.2 Urban intensification

Provincial policies require that cities prepare targets for increasing their population density. This process is referred to as intensification, and it is one that we support. Intensification will produce a city better able to support public transit and urban amenities without encroaching on the natural areas and other green spaces in the urban area.

However, it is sometimes argued that the existence of the Greenbelt is contrary to a policy of intensification. For example, the City's White Paper (released toward the end of the public consultation period for the most recent revision of the City of Ottawa's Official Plan) argued this position. It suggested that "at least one quarter (approximately 5,560 hectares) might be eligible for development consideration". In order to refute this type of argument, we will discuss the points made by the White Paper.

The most basic question is whether more land should be added to the urban area, and thus become available for development. The revised Official Plan limits the growth of the urban area, within which most development takes place (currently 35,265 ha), to just an additional 222 hectares. That is judged to be sufficient additional development land until at least 2031. This limit on the growth of the urban area is being done to promote intensification of the existing urban area. Taking land from the Greenbelt for development would be akin to increasing the size of the urban area, and thus contrary to a policy of intensification.

Another argument made for developing part of the Greenbelt is that the Greenbelt increases transportation costs for commuters and businesses, and increases City infrastructure costs for sewers, water mains and transit. We refute those arguments in Sections 4.3 below. Another argument given is that forcing development to leapfrog the Greenbelt increases urban sprawl. But on the contrary, opening the Greenbelt to

Federal Government will continue to manage the use of National Parks, National Wildlife Areas, Migratory Bird Sanctuaries, National Capital Commission lands and other federal areas established for ecosystem conservation purposes so as to sustain their wetland functions and natural processes." (Page 10).

⁵ Letter from the NCC to Shenkman Corporation, dated September 15, 2010; letter from François Lapointe, NCC, to Nancy Schepers, City Of Ottawa, dated October 1, 2010.

development would have the perverse effect of reducing density in the urban area, by permitting yet more low-density housing there.

The existence of the Greenbelt helps because it provides a nearby place for citizens to enjoy natural surroundings that are readily accessible. Cities need a high population density to function well, but they also need natural areas as a respite from buildings and roads.

4.3 Infrastructure

The “Infrastructure Corridor” land designation in the 1996 Master Plan is defensible in that it seeks to “minimize infrastructure intrusion in the Greenbelt by grouping major infrastructure in shared corridors ... and to improve public access to, and through, the Greenbelt” (p. 44).

The City’s White Paper argues that extra cost, energy usage and pollution are caused by infrastructure and transportation corridors having to pass through the Greenbelt in the process of connecting the inner city with the satellite communities. However, while there are components of cost associated with this, the existing infrastructure within these corridors consists of trunk facilities (highways, pipes, wires, conduits). Even if these trunks have sufficient capacity to support additional burdens of Greenbelt development, this would still require major local construction (side roads, branch pipes and lines). One tendency that connives to make Greenbelt development look like an economic opportunity is the unwise preference that Ottawa has shown for choosing centralized, “big pipe” infrastructure. For example, a local sewage treatment system was an option for Munster Township, but ignored by Ottawa’s decision makers despite reliable economic data supporting the local option.

If, after taking all factors into account, there are indeed somewhat higher net costs associated with having a Greenbelt (and that remains unproven) there are many compensating advantages, such as we describe elsewhere.

5 LEGAL STATUS OF THE GREENBELT

A major difference between our Greenbelt and that of many other cities such as the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), is that most of the land is publicly owned. The GTA Southern Ontario’s Greenbelt legislation sets limits on development, but most of the land remains in private ownership. Any proposal to change the uses of those lands for public benefit would require landowner cooperation, or expropriation. The NCC Greenbelt is virtually free from any such encumbrance. Consequently, the Government of Canada, through the National Capital Commission, is able to maintain and enhance the Greenbelt.

However, as we have seen and continue to see today, there are constant short-term pressures to nibble away at the Greenbelt. Considering the Greenbelt's environmental, social, and planning significance, and its world-renowned reputation, it is unsatisfactory that the Greenbelt is not referred to in any federal statute. It is long overdue that this extra-legal, de facto status be rectified by proper legislation. Greenbelt land should have clearly-defined boundaries protected by federal statute, preventing commercial and residential development and other incompatible activities.

6 CONCLUSION

In his 1958 speech to the House of Commons, Prime Minister Diefenbaker stated: "I should like to emphasize that this is a long-term project undertaken in the national interest, that is necessary and essential if the capital of Canada is to be preserved and developed so that it will be a capital city of which this generation and succeeding generations can and will be proud."

The Greenbelt, together with Gatineau Park and other natural lands including the three major rivers, comprise a showcase demonstrating to the world Canada's commitment to biodiversity conservation in and around its capital city. Many cities now have a Greenbelt, but the National Capital Greenbelt, lying between the central city and the satellite communities, and having almost no residential areas within it, is one of the assets that make Ottawa special. Its green continuity brings prestige, proclaiming: "We are a nation that values its ecological past, and we are actively planning for a sustainable future." If there is any lack of appreciation elsewhere in Canada for these major assets of the nation's capital, this is because, unlike in other nations, little has been done to inform Canadians about this part of their heritage. With modest effort, Canadians could be brought to regard their own capital city with as much pride as Americans regard Washington, and the citizens of other nations respectively regard Berlin, Brasilia, Canberra, Paris or Stockholm.

Most residents of the national capital region know about some elements of the Greenbelt, but many are not aware of its full extent. This is understandable because there is no signage along roads and there are no handy maps of the Greenbelt as a whole. In short, both the local community and the rest of Canada and the world could benefit from better promotion and education about the Greenbelt.

Planning for an unknown future is best approached by keeping one's options open, which means retaining public ownership of all Greenbelt land, and refraining from erecting built facilities upon it. Maintaining land in a natural state is also the least expensive since Nature does the work for us. There is plenty of land outside the Greenbelt for generating wealth, while at the same time, the fundamental wealth represented by, for example, an ability to grow food, can continue to exist within the Greenbelt.