

# *Stand together to save the Greenbelt*

**SHERRY HAYES**

Despite broad public opposition; municipalities against Greenbelt disturbance; environmental groups raising red flags; the auditor general's scathing report indicating bias, lack of transparency and developer driven decisions; the integrity commissioner citing broken ethics rules and finally, political opposition – ultimately, it appears destruction still looms.

Truthfully, most everyone is in favour of housing for all. However, we've heard repeatedly that there is no evidence precious Greenbelt lands are needed for this. There is enough available land set aside to build government mandated housing without the Greenbelt out expansion. Yet the claims continue that sudden population increases are forcing the necessity to pillage critical lands.

Here's a novel idea. Use the existing available lands first, then determine if the Greenbelt is needed.

According to reports, on February 28, 2005, the Greenbelt Act was passed by the Ontario government, creating one of the world's largest Greenbelts and permanently protecting over two million acres of highly productive farmland and environmentally sensitive areas.

Is someone forgetting the Niagara Escarpment is a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve?

The escarpment represents the largest continuous stretch of primarily forested land in south-central Ontario. These habitats collectively boast the highest level of species diversity among Canadian biosphere reserves, including more than 300 bird species, 55 mammals, 36 reptiles and amphibians, 90 fish and 100 varieties of special interest flora.

There are unique features and wildlife found only within this magnificent region and include at-risk and endangered species inhabiting these treasured areas. This region also boasts some of the best fertile farmlands. How can anyone consider destroying these special gifts?

Our wetlands? It is generally understood they are an integral part of any ecosystem, each one developing over time. Flora and fauna supported by these crucial spaces help keep nature thriving. Whether wildlife maintains permanent residency or are seasonal migratory visitors, wetlands are nonetheless critical for the survival of all that depend on these spaces.

How is it presumed acceptable to build massive developments over these areas? Are delicate lands simply there for the taking? Does anyone truly believe that a destroyed ecologically sensitive area can be rebuilt elsewhere? Will every single element in each disrupted wetland be carefully lifted and relocated?

Could the flora and fauna even survive such drastic measures? Will migratory wildlife know where to find their 'new home'? Build it and they will come?

And our endangered species? Seemingly - who cares! If these at-risk species can be found elsewhere in the province, apparently, it's simply okay to decimate populations in areas ripe for development. Pay a fine and all is good? Change how species are now classified? Extend the timeline for placing a species on the endangered list? How is any of this right?

This government is running wild over precious lands and species throughout our province, all for the sake of massive development and new "time saving" highways. This intent to destroy such vital lands and life is dismaying. It seems inconceivable, reprehensible, ludicrous - and unjust.

With so many reports and extensive opposition regarding all the above, the question begs to be asked. What exactly does it take for this government to admit all of this is just not right and reverse the course of these multiple disasters in the making?

Humankind does not own this planet. We are here to share it with every other living entity. We were not put on this earth to destroy everything in existence for the sake of self-indulgence. When the farmlands, wetlands, forests, watersheds, environmentally-sensitive lands plus a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve continue to be destroyed, we must stand up in solidarity and cry out loud and clear – Enough is enough!

SHERRY HAYES LIVES IN  
STONE CREEK