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## SLSN Response to Key Planning and Conservation Issues

**SLSN Letter/Report of Regarding York Region Council Meeting Decision on Growth Plan 2051** - SLSN have over many years made comment on Regional and Municipal Official and Secondary Plans and Provincial Policy initiatives. The recent York Region Growth Plan our organization, like many others advised of priorities in intensification, retention of Greenbelt and White Belt lands from development among other initiatives. In spite of a groundswell of opposition in the region against sprawl development Regional Council voted to proceed in that direction.

### SOUTH LAKE SIMCOE NATURALISTS

*SLSN is a Not-for-profit Member of Ontario Nature.*

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#### York Region Chair and Council

#### Report Submission to York Region Council Special Meeting, October 21, 2021

2021-10-20

#### Executive Summary

The South Lake Simcoe Naturalists (SLSN) believes York Region should be accommodating at minimum of **60%** of projected demand for new homes and workplaces within existing built-up areas (the intensification rate), and we concur with York **Region Report Alternate 2051 Forecast and Land Needs Assessment Scenarios in Response to Consultation, alternative forecast scenario 4**. Although Regional staff have clearly identified the obvious economic, social and particularly environmental benefits of this scenario, their recommendations to Council fall short and are not in our opinion of sufficient justification. It is the role of Council to push the envelope of creative thinking with their decision in our opinion, as responses to recent pandemic has all shown us. The Region should also be developing its existing designated greenfield area densities no less than the 80 residents and jobs per hectare as previously in 2017 prescribed under the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe.

With regard to intensification, there should be zero settlement area boundary expansions for 10 years. There is demonstrably much land for infill in York Region as has been repeatedly demonstrated by the Neptis Foundation and others. By prioritization of these lands for this development, where servicing already exists, York Region to undertake meaningful, and planned Environmental Assessments for upgrades and servicing without settlement area boundary expansions in the sensitive Lake Simcoe watershed area of the Region, which is our primary concern. It is expected this strategy would result in more transit-supportive communities, not prioritize York's clear

need for affordable housing, and not adequately conserve more farmland and natural areas for future generations. New and innovative ideas are needed now. It is also concerning that only now, yesterday Bill 5, York Region Wastewater Act passed second reading, has the overall future servicing of Upper York Region been decided after years of protracted and financially wasteful undertakings and decision. More time and work is needed to proceed with a final Growth Plan to 2051 before decisions are rendered on the issues above.

No matter what, protect the currently delineated Greenbelt area (protected countryside) and the Oak Ridges Moraine lands in perpetuity. We believe we need solid ground-breaking leadership at the political level by York Region Council at this time, not the same old sprawl subdivisions apparently still proposed by many development interests. Objective and rigorous academic gaze and review of intensification development scenarios presented must happen before decisions are made. Concepts like Degrowth (examples especially from Europe), and in the Countryside landscape new restoration, Rivers focus of mitigation of development and restoration of natural features and functions ahead of development and developer proposals across the landscape, ReWilding concepts, science informed landscape ecology principled planning, and detailed Climate modelling geographically focused and informed across the Region.

### **Response to YR Council Reports**

SLSN recognize the significant challenges of the population increase directed by the province for an increase by the province for 2.2 million people to the 30-year, 2051 horizon for York Region. Given what has been characterized by many as a considerably short timeframe to produce reports at this time for politicians, we commend them for their efforts. However, we warn and caution the necessarily surficial nature of analysis and recommendations of growth projections and density scenarios are problematic. Our organization's members are concerned about impacts on the complex natural areas, the landscape of human cultural communities, and their interrelationships. We think much more detailed work of reconnaissance, data collection, human social science survey investigation and analysis, mapping, overlay studies etc., would better characterize community-informed opinion on scenarios presented. Community concern exists regarding the real future constraints and emerging concerns, a few of which we have listed below.

A necessary rigorous and defensible Regional Climate Plan that is geographically specific to the Growth Plan proposed to existing urban and exurban (White Belt areas) must be community comprehensive and part of this exercise now, so that Regional Council, municipal Councils and the broader York Region constituent communities have input and community confidence of environmental integrity of what is actually being done to mitigate this proposed considerable growth projected and landscape upheaval expected to 2051.

First Principal, no matter what, protect the currently delineated Greenbelt area (protected countryside) and the Oak Ridges Moraine lands. As detailed by regional staff, and I understand steadfastly supported by the current provincial government, these unique landscapes and natural/cultural community places will be invaluable natural, farmland/foodlands and rural communities in 75, 100 years and beyond. Their conserved value will be really obvious in the future.

### **Greenbelt and Oak Ridges Moraine Protection:**

Our organization was involved in community movements, consultations, and submissions to three levels of government over the past decades, and I have never received more impassioned advocacy in our members for full continuing conservation of these Provincially identified and protected planning units. As senior regional staff in York Region Report regarding Alternative 2051 Forecast and Land Needs Assessment Scenarios in Response to Consultation have details; Provincial Policy prohibits Urban Expansion into the Protected Countryside of the Greenbelt and Oak Ridges Moraine Plan areas. Similarly, the current Provincial Government of Doug Ford has been very clear publicly, that they will continue to protect these areas.

The Greenbelt and Oak Ridges Moraine protect the headwaters creeks and streams, and entire reaches of our three main rivers in South Lake Simcoe the Pefferlaw, Black and Maskinonge. We have further implored the Ontario Provincial Government for years in past consultations to designate their urban reaches in Pefferlaw, Sutton and Keswick, including the recent "Growing the Greenbelt" consultation "Urban River Valley designation". This York Region Growth projection to 2051 in the northern part, our support of Greenbelt protection, in which much of the geographic area of our membership is located is summarized recently by the Ontario Greenbelt Alliance which we support.

The Greenbelt is a broad band of permanently protected land which:

- Protects against the loss and fragmentation of the agricultural land base and supports agriculture as the predominant land use.
- Gives permanent protection to the natural heritage and water resource systems that sustain ecological and human health and that form the environmental framework around which major urbanization in south-central Ontario will be organized.
- Provides for a diverse range of economic and social activities associated with rural communities, agriculture, tourism, recreation, and resource uses; and

Concomitant with the 2051 Growth Plan must be a Re-Wilding Plan for York Region (should be for the entire G.T.A.). Previously we recommended this action more than a decade ago as a stakeholder organization in the development of the Lake Simcoe Act and Plan process undertaken by the Province of Ontario at that time. Our organization and other community groups were able to undertake projects in this regard. Fortunately, much of this work occurred through the Federal Lake Simcoe Clean-Up Fund (LSCUF) whereby significant project monies and Environment Canada staff resources were brought to reducing phosphorus in non-point source and point source circumstances through community and agency engagement and research. Projects were designed, undertaken, and completed in this program for almost a decade, and much important on-the-ground restoration and research projects addressing then-current priority actions to many landscapes water filtration, natural areas connection, and specifically phosphorus loading reduction in the Lake Simcoe watershed. This York Region Growth Plan for the future should have a focus in these Lake Simcoe health, long-term sustainability planning of development in these scenario documents politicians are expected to vote on.

In 2020, as part of the High Ambition Coalition for Nature and People "The Peoples Summit" [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wb5xsKTFDcl&ab\\_channel=WildlandsLeague](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wb5xsKTFDcl&ab_channel=WildlandsLeague) , Canada committed to protecting 25 % of its lands and waters by 2025 and 30 % by 2030. These new targets reflect the urgent need to make peace with nature and stem the accelerating loss of biodiversity worldwide, and evolving climate change impacts. While the Government of Ontario announced in April 2021 its intention to expand the province's protected areas, it was silent on the new collective targets. Currently, less than 11 % of Ontario is protected. We can and must do better!

With this 2051 Growth Plan a redoubling of all these resources above, and more to mitigate and manage natural and cultural historic landscapes of Provincial funding due to new orders of magnitude population numbers increasing across the Region, being planned now. International emerging concepts of future planning change and social and cultural societal changes like Degrowth and related in the academic literature, should inform ideas in this Growth planning to 2051 and beyond. SLSN advise additional to reinstating the LSCUF, that Federal resources again be aggressively sought by all three levels of Ontario (Municipal, Regional and Provincial political forums) and agencies, to immediately plan and undertake this growth process. The focus of Rivers is timely as Environment and Climate Change Canada has recently announced a Canada Water Agency in a process of wide-ranging consultations across the country. York Region and other G.T.A. and the Golden Horseshoe would do well to bring in resources to their Growth Plan development especially as regards the future health of Lake Simcoe.

As always SLSN remain interested and available for further positive consultation within the limitations of our resources.



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