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**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

Friday 14 May 2004

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Vendredi 14 mai 2004

**Standing committee on
general government**

Greenbelt Protection Act, 2004

**Comité permanent des
affaires gouvernementales**

**Loi de 2004 sur la protection
de la ceinture de verdure**

Chair: Jean-Marc Lalonde
Clerk: Tonia Grannum

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
GENERAL GOVERNMENT**

**COMITÉ PERMANENT DES
AFFAIRES GOUVERNEMENTALES**

Friday 14 May 2004

Vendredi 14 mai 2004

The committee met at 1300 in the Quality Hotel Parkway Convention Centre, St Catharines.

GREENBELT PROTECTION ACT, 2004

**LOI DE 2004 SUR LA PROTECTION
DE LA CEINTURE DE VERDURE**

Consideration of Bill 27, An Act to establish a greenbelt study area and to amend the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Act, 2001 / Projet de loi 27, Loi établissant une zone d'étude de la ceinture de verdure et modifiant la Loi de 2001 sur la conservation de la moraine d'Oak Ridges.

The Chair (Mr Jean-Marc Lalonde): I will call this meeting to order. First of all, I'd like to welcome you all to this public hearing on Bill 27, An Act to establish a greenbelt study area and to amend the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Act, 2001.

The groups that will make presentations today will be allowed 20 minutes. The 20 minutes could be taken by the presenter or some time may be left for a question period. Today we have three parties represented here.

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): Three official parties.

The Chair: Three official parties, yes. I said "three parties."

If there is only, let's say, a minute and a half left at the end, I will not split the minute and a half in three. I will alternate. The first one will be the official opposition, then the official NDP and then the Liberals. We will make sure that everybody has a chance.

TOWN OF LINCOLN

The Chair: The first group will be the town of Lincoln, Mayor Bill Hodgson. Your Worship, on behalf of the committee, I'd like to welcome you to this public hearing. Again, you have 20 minutes. You can take the whole 20 minutes or leave some time for questions at the end of your presentation. You may proceed.

Mr Bill Hodgson: Thank you very much. I'm very pleased I was invited to be here today. I'd like to take this opportunity also to welcome all of you to Niagara. You may have noticed one of the most beautiful green stretches of the QEW as you were driving down here today, and that would be the town of the Lincoln. We're extremely proud of the stewardship that has been shown

by our farm community. We're very proud of our natural features.

The Greenbelt Protection Act, although it has what I might describe as scary aspects to it, is a good thing, and we look at it as a positive. We're very pleased to have this kind of opportunity to have a dialogue so we can ensure that it's done right. I'm so pleased that you're here today and that you're going to listen to my two cents' worth, at least this time, and I'm sure I'll have opportunity once again at some later date.

The town of Lincoln isn't green because of an accident. It's not green because we've just been left over, and we're not green because development hasn't got there yet. We have very restrictive policies in place in Niagara. They've impacted the town of Lincoln, but they've been welcomed in the town of Lincoln as well.

The policies that are in place have encouraged us over the years to maintain that green focus in our town. In fact, I think it was in 1970, when the regional government was formed and the townships and villages were amalgamated, that one of the names on the list for our municipality was Lincoln Green. So we take it seriously and we want to see that it stays Lincoln green.

One of our main issues, and one of the alarm bells that goes off, is with the term "greenbelt," because we've always thought of ourselves in Niagara as the Niagara fruit belt. Fruit was a commodity, and the focus then was commodity. There was a realization that whatever you were doing to that area, you had to deal with the commodities involved. The term "greenbelt" then sort of implies that "green" has now become the commodity. While I think green is a commodity, and we market green as a commodity and welcome people—I know many of you have probably visited some of our green tourist destinations—it does open the door to interpretations that are not always friendly with every type of activity that is green and green-sustaining.

So I guess the main point we want to make is that whatever the greenbelt initiative ultimately becomes through this legislation and regulations that are proposed through its implementation, we're very concerned and interested that in Niagara, and specifically in the town of Lincoln, the focus, the perspective on the greenbelt is a perspective that supports and maintains a viable, vibrant and verdant agricultural community.

I'm going to embark very quickly on a short little story about the past. There are all these ironies that

happen in peoples' lives, and one of them for me is that within three weeks of being sworn in as mayor—and this is my first experience in municipal government—the Greenbelt Protection Act arrived. Back in the late 1970s, I was hired by the National Capital Commission in Ottawa to head a task force to prepare a management plan for the greenbelt. The reason they hired me—I have the report here, just as a little prop. I won't bore you with the report, but it's interesting that back that many years ago, and with a greenbelt of a different type, but still a greenbelt, the planning objectives were very similar.

They had problems. They had accumulated the land, and they had articulated the objectives, but they just didn't know how to get there. There were problems implementing it. Right near the start of this management plan, the biggest problem identified was that different groups brought different perspectives to the table when they talked about preparing implementation and management plans for the assets in the greenbelt.

One of our first initiatives was to break the greenbelt into sectors. We had conservation sectors, forestry sectors, recreational and multi-use sectors and then, importantly, there were 80 farms in what were farm sectors. When I say "sectors," I mean they were large geographic areas. The rural area north of the escarpment in the town of Lincoln really falls into one of those categories. I would suggest it is a farm sector.

So it's interesting that, all these many years later, here I am in a position to try to do what I can to help, once again, to have a workable greenbelt established. I'm committed to doing that, and our town council is committed to doing that too.

My next point comes to whether we're going to be positive or whether we're going to be negative. When I say "we," I mean those who actually develop the greenbelt plan, the greenbelt framework, the greenbelt initiative. If this exercise amounts to nothing more than a mapping of boundaries and the preparation of a list of uses that are not permitted, it will be perceived as—in fact, it will be—a relatively negative initiative. It will lead to resentment and will leave a lot of stones unturned, and I'm not sure the objectives will ultimately be realized.

There is another way of looking at it, however. If everyone involved is as committed to making the greenbelt work, as I am and as the farm community and the people who live in our small towns and villages in Niagara are, to the long-term preservation of the Niagara fruit belt area, then we will all join together and, through this process, we will declare that these lands are not worth less than they were yesterday. They are in fact, and must be declared as, a priceless national treasure, a priceless asset.

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This may sound silly, but I don't think it is. The way this exercise can in fact make this declaration is by ensuring that this is not just one more restrictive planning exercise, that it is much, much more than something that is just imposed. It must be seen as a very robust, very full

rural and agricultural development strategy and everything that might imply.

I think that today you're going to hear—so I'm not going to go into a lot of the specific issues that commodity groups are having to deal with. But if you will recall, back in the 1960s and 1970s, the province, through the Agricultural Rehabilitation and Development Act, put forward a lot of initiatives that were aimed at a system—not just the farm communities across Ontario but rural communities across Ontario—in adjusting to the kinds of pressures, the kinds of trends that they were experiencing at that time. There are a lot of important trends that others know more about and are more articulate in expressing than me, and I hope you'll hear some of those pressures and some of the trends today.

What this bill has the opportunity to do is to provide the framework for developing a very comprehensive rural development strategy. Nothing would please me more than to be able to tell the world and welcome the world as visitors to the town of Lincoln, knowing that this area is going to be a beautiful, green rural landscape with viable, sustainable farm units, with exciting small towns that offer a full range of high-end opportunities for visitors and residents alike. I think it can be achieved if we all work together to develop a comprehensive strategy.

I'll just give you, very quickly, a few of my ideas about implementation. The first point I want to make is that the initiative must be based on trusting the people who live in the affected towns and their locally elected governments. They can be trusted, because they will work to achieve these objectives. They can be trusted, and therefore need to be addressed from a point of trust, not from a point of, "We are going to do this to you." I don't mean to be negative in that, by there are overtones of that. It's very easy, obviously, for the local municipalities to feel that something's being done to them. I just want to know that something positive is being done to us. I think we welcome it.

The second point is timing. Timing is critical for a lot of initiatives. Whenever you intervene in the marketplace in a way that actually can affect the competitive land market, you can skew things very seriously and have a serious impact on people's investment. This is not to say that it can't be achieved. It's just that the order in which things occur here is very critical.

Again, this goes back to the positive message. We need to do some things that send out a positive message about the pricelessness, the invaluable part of these lands, before we start doing things which are perceived to in fact reduce their value. So I would just ask that we consider those things about timing.

We need to see a serious reinvestment in this province in research and marketing. There simply needs to be a reinvestment. I'll go back to the timing issue. We need to deal with content issues, stores for VQA wines. Those kinds of things need to happen before, or at least in tandem with, increasing the restricted land use. I just think it's time. They've got to move together or else we

actually bonus special interest groups, and I don't think that's the intention of this initiative.

The community reinvestment funds are in place to help rural municipalities shoulder some of the impact of not being able to attract the levels and the kinds of industry and commercial assessment that other communities can. I think that vehicle alone offers up opportunities for this initiative to, in a real sense, compensate municipalities and at the same time deliver the kind of relief to our agricultural community that needs some relief from the impact of the current assessment rules in terms of value-added production facilities on their farms. So these things need to be done in tandem.

I think I'm going to stop there. I have a few others in terms of facilitating farm enlargement, and there are other areas we could discuss at some other time. It will let others present.

The Chair: We have approximately three and a half minutes left. I'll go to the official opposition.

Mr Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): Thank you very much, Mayor Hodgson. Folks may not know that the mayor has done an outstanding job locally in calling together stakeholders in the town of Lincoln and Niagara to present a position on the greenbelt. I appreciate the comprehensive nature that a greenbelt alone will not be successful; you need the strategies to support it.

Maybe I'll ask you to push a bit more on the municipal side in terms of how the greenbelt legislation, as structured, will bound Lincoln in, the pressures that will put on your existing tax base and suggested remedies.

Mr Hodgson: We already have among the highest property taxes, and we don't have the kinds of facilities that other communities have. When I say "other," I mean more urban communities and certainly communities where there is significant rapid growth going on. That isn't to say that we expect to have big city facilities. What we need to recognize, however, is that people live here. The majority of people are not farmers, they are not employed in the agricultural sector, and there is no justifiable reason that people whose towns will now be encompassed within the greenbelt area should be denied access to reasonable recreational and cultural facilities. These things are increasingly out of touch. I won't even go to the areas of buried infrastructure and roads. I think that's a problem that is common across the province.

The Chair: I'll go to Ms Churley.

Ms Churley: Thank you very much for your presentation. There's not enough time to ask reasonable questions, but I guess I would like to know what your biggest challenge is in your beautiful town right now. Are you having a lot of development applications? Is that why you're welcoming the greenbelt legislation?

Mr Hodgson: No, as a matter of fact. I think I would actually say we are not experiencing the kinds of pressure for development that you might read about. I read in the newspaper the other day, for example, that in Niagara we have way more severances per thousand acres than others. Our farms, particularly in Niagara, are about 25% the size of the average across the province. If you only

include the farms in the tender fruit lands, I would imagine it might be more like 10% or 15% of the size. This is some of the oldest settlement area in the country and, of course, because of the, at one time, reasonable farm incomes, fathers divided up lands for their sons. Now, just like general agriculture, what we're seeing and experiencing is the trend to enlarging the farm because of shrinking margins. To facilitate that, we see the severing of surplus farm dwellings. That doesn't create a new house, and I don't think it should be stated as a real challenge. I think it's actually just part of the adjustment process that the farm community has to use right now.

If the province would like to see the farm community go in a different direction, there are alternatives that have been proposed.

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The Chair: I'll go to the government side.

Mr Kim Craitor (Niagara Falls): Mr Mayor, it's a pleasure to see you again, and thank you for taking the time to come out and present on behalf of your community. I jotted down a couple of your comments, which I totally agree with, and I want the record to show it. When you said it's not just mapping, you're correct. The bill cannot just be mapping.

I just want to quickly share with you before I ask you my question—I'll do this very quickly, Mr Chair. I had the pleasure of hosting a round table here at Niagara College and about 150 fruit growers and grape growers showed up. I quickly learned that this is not the first time, as you said. This has been studied by previous governments.

I know you didn't go into all the detail you might have wanted to, but I think it's important for us on this side, so I really would like you to send to the committee some of your ideas when you use the word "sustainability." I know you talk about VQA and VQA stores, and I hear a lot from the fruit growers and the grape growers about sustainability. Can you send that information on to the committee?

The other thing I want to share with you is that it is not about one ministry. This sustainability has to be done through at least four different ministries, which I'm certainly working with. I want to share that with you. The committee's intention is to assist you in any way. So if you could do that, I'd appreciate it.

The Chair: Our time is up. I appreciate very much the time you have taken to come down and address the committee.

Mr Hodgson: Thank you very much. I'll make sure that I send some written material you.

WINE COUNCIL OF ONTARIO

The Chair: The next group is the Wine Council of Ontario, Linda Franklin. Welcome to the committee. Once again, you have 20 minutes. Either you take the whole 20 minutes or you leave some time at the end for questions from the three parties.

Ms Linda Franklin: All right. I'll try to leave some time for questions, then. Thanks very much.

I'm the president of the Wine Council of Ontario. We appreciate this opportunity to be here in Niagara with you to talk about what we believe is a fairly crucial issue, not just for our members, but for the future of tourism, agriculture, transportation and economic growth in Niagara generally.

A little background on us: The Wine Council of Ontario has 57 members representing 62 winery properties. All of our wineries own vineyards, and winery-owned vineyards now account for almost 30% of all the wine grape vineyards grown in Niagara and southwestern Ontario. The industry itself currently accounts for over \$400 million in sales of wine, contributes upwards of \$200 million in taxes provincially and federally every year—half of what we make we give you back—and we're the driving force behind more than 750,000 tourism visits each year. In addition to that, our members add value to the economy of Ontario. We contribute \$3.88 in added economic value for every bottle of wine we sell, which compares fairly favourably to 46 cents of value-added for every imported wine sold.

Behind all these facts and figures are dedicated wine growers whose goal it is to double the Niagara acreage planted in fine wine grapes in the next 10 to 15 years. We see a future where we are very sustainable over the long term. We see a future where all of the acres that can be planted in wine grapes are. They'll be planted with fine wine grapes and they'll be entirely dedicated to the VQA, which is 100% domestic content, because that marketplace will have grown enough to sustain that over the next few years. We believe, though, that over the long term, that goal is in jeopardy because of development trends in Niagara, and we believe they're threatening the unique agricultural lands we rely on.

We know that members of this committee care about that, as does the government and, frankly, we should all care if the precious non-renewable resources that are the soil and climate of Niagara are lost, paved over and urbanized. So we come before you today in full support of the need for an agricultural preserve in Niagara and for this bill, which will help make that a reality.

We understand that there are huge pressures for development. We know that there are another 3.5 million people expected to be living in southern Ontario by the year 2035. But we also know this: Only 5% of all the land in Canada is prime agricultural land, and Ontario contains just over half of that. Much of that land is right here in Niagara, married to a climate that is not reproduced anywhere else in Ontario. We know that, in the words of the Centre for Land and Water Stewardship at the University of Guelph, southern Ontario's limited supply of agricultural land is going out of production at an alarming rate. The rate is most alarming here in Niagara, and I think the mayor referred to some facts that we've referred to before about that. Research conducted by the centre at the University of Guelph shows that on average in the 1990s—not generations ago, but in the

past decade—1.04 residential lots were created per 1,000 acres of agricultural land generally in Ontario. During that same period, agricultural land in Niagara was going out of production at more than three times that rate: 3.62 residential lots were created here for every 1,000 acres of agricultural land.

The thing about land is, as the saying goes, they're not making any more of it. So once this invaluable, irreplaceable farmland is gone, it is truly gone, and with it will go the future prospects for a key part of Ontario's agricultural base. If the current rate of development is allowed to continue, vineyard growth will stagnate and so will the booming wine and culinary tourism industry that is helping revitalize Niagara. This is a serious concern for our members, the vast majority of whom are located in the Niagara region with its unique microclimate that creates one of the few places in Canada capable of supporting a fine wine and tender fruit industry.

Instead, wars of attrition have been going on, and I guess we would differ with some of the members of councils on this. Our wineries have been fighting proposed severance and zoning changes for years. Even as they do that, though, developers are continuing to buy and hold agricultural land in Niagara, working toward the day when the current zoning will change and more agricultural land will be urbanized.

It's clear that the current policies meant to preserve agricultural land have not been effective enough, although they've certainly helped. That's why we support this legislation. What is needed is a consistent, long-term provincial approach and vision for the future. We believe this greenbelt strategy is the first step in achieving this vision, and we also believe that the work of the commission set up by the province must include specific focus on Niagara's unique situation.

We think there are four key elements of land preservation that are important from our perspective: (1) farm severances, (2) urban expansion, (3) the need for consistency in policy and (4) addressing the needs of the farm community.

First, severances: We know this is a sensitive issue in Niagara, but it is difficult, frankly, to envision any credible land preservation strategy that allows severances to continue. Although they may be small individually, severances collectively amount to death by a thousand cuts in agricultural land. Again, our view is supported by research from the University of Guelph's Centre for Land and Water Stewardship, which has done extensive work on severances. The university's research shows that the current situation in Niagara is indeed concerning. Niagara has a very high rate of severance approvals in comparison to other regions with significant agricultural land and, while the number of approved severances has certainly been decreasing over the past few years, each additional severance adds to the accumulation of agricultural land that's being withdrawn from the practice of agriculture. There are some instances, of course, where severances are about adding to farm property, but these are far and away the unusual example. The far more

normal example is that land is severed for the eventual creation of residential lots.

While the region has policies in place to acknowledge the importance of agriculture, including the classification of agricultural land in the official plan, 833 lots were still created in the 1990s, which introduced a new residential use into the agricultural land in Niagara. Of these lots, 414 were created by allowing a farmer to sever a retirement lot, and an additional 162 residential lots were created by severing a surplus dwelling from a farm. Thus, official land use policies and plans are not preventing a severance policy, although we certainly applaud the effort at the municipal and regional levels, because it has without doubt mitigated the potential scope of the problem. From 1990 to 2000, a total of 5,485 severance applications were made to the region.

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Whatever the reason for creating a severance, one fact is clear: Farm severances remove land from agricultural production the vast majority of the time, making it more difficult for farm operations to expand and increasing the potential for conflict between farm operations and residential neighbours, which is of course a big concern to us in the wine industry. Because a number of aspects of farm operations are incompatible with residential development, it's important that this interface be limited, so as to limit the potential for serious conflict when farmers are engaged in normal farming practices. The wine industry, frankly, does not believe there's a place for continued farm severances in the sensitive, unique agricultural lands of Niagara.

Our second issue is around urbanization. We know that Ontario must be further urbanized to meet the growing needs of a growing population and an expanding industrial base, as the mayor of Lincoln spoke to, but it can't go on unchecked, and it must be directed away from our primary agricultural lands toward more appropriate areas. In the Niagara region, there's a logical and appropriate direction for further urbanization: to the south. There are many communities in south Niagara that would welcome new urban development. Those communities are not home to the exceptional microclimates or unique soil conditions that make the land below the escarpment so vital to agriculture.

To help facilitate appropriate urban expansion in this area, our council believes that the mid-peninsula corridor must proceed as a critical component of the Niagara land preserve. Otherwise, pressure to widen the QEW and locate more industry and development along that corridor will be irresistible. The QEW runs through some of the peninsula's best agricultural land. Continuing development along this corridor will simply erode our best agriculture lands, while starving some of the Niagara region of the economic development potential to the south that it needs to prosper.

Third in our issue list is consistency. We need consistent rules and practices throughout the Niagara region. Right now, each municipality has its own set of rules and regulations regarding wineries, and it's resulted

in a patchwork that is both inefficient and unfair. The issue of consistency is highlighted by the Niagara Escarpment Commission plan area.

Two years ago, the NEC held hearings on the wine industry as part of its five-year review. Its report provided many positive recommendations but also produced many troubling conclusions that differ from the way that municipalities currently manage the wine industry and that result in damage to the health and potential of the industry. We think the issues raised by the NEC report should be considered as part of these land preserve discussions and that we should end up, at the end of the process, with one set of clear, consistent rules that apply to our industry right across the province.

Finally, we agree that the needs of the farming community have to be addressed in this discussion. All of our members are farmers. They all have the same concerns the farming community does about viability, profitability and so forth. In any area where a decision has been taken to preserve agricultural land for the future, the concerns of farmers who own the land are appropriately addressed, as they must be.

In many parts of the United States, compensation issues have been addressed through the establishment of land trusts, an idea that's been carefully explored by the Ontario land preservation trust, headed by Dr Stewart Hiltz. Clearly, if Niagara's tender fruit land is to be preserved in the future, as it must be, then some system of compensation must also be established. The land trust model, we believe, is a good starting place to look for inspiration.

In addition, to keep farmers on the land, the government should find ways to create a more level playing field for the farm community than currently exists. In the United States, as well as in Europe, government programs and subsidies help the farm community cover the cost of many initiatives, including critical research, irrigation, export programs and replanting requirements, to name just a few. This gives farmers from countries that compete with Canada a decided advantage.

Recently, the announcement of a federally funded, multi-year strategy to eradicate plum pox will make it far easier to manage this serious threat effectively and keep our farmers competitive. We believe that's an important initiative and the kind of thing that should be looked at in this context.

A more comprehensive approach to addressing the needs of the farm community and lands under the green-belt strategy should include a careful review of areas such as research and irrigation that should be subject to government support to maintain our competitiveness and ensure farm viability.

We believe as well, frankly—the wine industry has a 20-year strategic plan. If that strategic plan is successful—and the first two years have been very successful—we believe that we can produce long-term, sustainable growth in Niagara and on these lands. One of our members is fond of saying that when a wine region takes off, it begins to become the most expensive land on the

planet. That's certainly true in Burgundy, it's true in Bordeaux, it's true in Tuscany. There are many places in the world we can look to where, once agriculture related to winemaking takes off, once the wine gains credibility and clout in the marketplace, then profitability comes with it.

We think our strategic vision will achieve this. We don't want to plant more low-priced grapes to go into low-priced blended wines. We want the few acres of agricultural land we have here to be turned over to the production of high-priced premium grapes for our highest-priced, most premium VQA wines. That's a vision we believe will support sustainability in the long term. We think an agricultural subcommittee or task force on the greenbelt process should be put together to develop specific proposals to bring forward in this regard.

In closing, I want to leave this thought with the committee. We in Ontario are behind the times when it comes to preserving vital agricultural land. It's already been done in British Columbia; it's been done in the Napa Valley. In BC, the agricultural land preserve has been in place for more than 25 years, and it's been successful in slowing the rate of farmland loss without ruining the economy. Likewise in Napa, the land preserve has ensured the preservation of vineyards and land for vineyards. The result is that land has skyrocketed in value, eliminating the need for concern that it might be more valuable to developers. Other communities in California are following in Napa's footsteps, creating their own preserves; most recently the Lodi region.

The land preservation strategy we need to adopt should certainly be unique to our own realities. But, make no mistake, we need to adopt one now. There are many examples before us of communities that have done this successfully.

The Ontario grape and wine industry is healthy today. We are optimistic about the future, and we will remain optimistic if we can work together to make the right decisions about preserving the tender fruit lands in Niagara. We absolutely believe this is a priority. This can only be done by immediate and decisive action. We agree that there are many stakeholders who need to be consulted. We think they all should be consulted and should be part of the process, but at the end of the day we would urge you to work together to implement a clear and unequivocal plan to preserve our unique agricultural lands. It won't be easy, but it's worth being done.

The Chair: We have three and a half minutes left. I'm going to go to Ms Churley.

Ms Churley: Nice to see you again.

Ms Franklin: You too.

Ms Churley: That's a very informative brief. Thank you very much. I wanted to ask you to elaborate a little bit on your comment about the NEC hearings and how some of the results of those hearings impacted negatively on your industry.

Ms Franklin: Sure. The report hasn't been acted on yet, so we're still hopeful of change. One of the things

we're concerned about is that the NEC took a view of the wine industry that looks back about 200 years. It looked to an industry where there would be a lot of hand-picking of grapes by people walking through small parcels of vineyards. As a result of that vision, they made a series of recommendations.

The hearing officer suggested that there shouldn't be any further restaurants at wineries. Frankly, although we don't think there are going to be thousands of those, at the end of the day those restaurants are driving regional cuisine movements, tourism movements, all sorts of things that are adding, we think, to the viability of that land base. So we think that needs to be looked at.

They suggested an absolute cap on the size of wineries that was fairly small. Our suggestion is simply to look at the acreage we're sitting on. If you sit on 100 acres of land and you need to bring in the grapes from those 100 acres, probably you're going to have size issues, because if you're making fine wine, you need space to store barrels.

We think in general there were a lot of issues that simply weren't fully discussed and debated by the NEC. Their recommendations fight with municipal bylaws in Niagara-on-the-Lake, in the town of Lincoln, all looking at different sizes for winery properties. We think we just need to take a look at the whole thing together.

The Chair: To the government side.

Mr Wayne Arthurs (Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge): I've got a question with regard to the value being put into the system, into the economic activity, at almost \$4 a bottle compared to 46 cents. In many areas I hear that agricultural sustainability is such that there is not enough money in the business to stay in agriculture. It appears here that this is the viable approach. Could I have some quick explanation on the extensive value of the Ontario wine industry compared to imports?

Ms Franklin: Sure. That was based on a study commissioned by the Wine Council of Ontario, done by KPMG a couple of years ago. What it found, I think, is fairly straightforward. Because the Ontario wine industry largely sources from Ontario and employs Ontarians, those Ontarians buy houses and cars, pay personal income tax, pay business taxes. When you look at all of those things together, that produces that effect per bottle. I think you're right that agriculture in some areas isn't quite so profitable and it is difficult. Certainly there are challenges in the wine industry as well, as both wineries and growers would argue. But our great sense of optimism, I think, is that consumers in Ontario are buying more Ontario wine, better Ontario wine, and the more we move up the value chain—the more consumers are buying \$12 bottles of our wine rather than \$10 bottles—the more profitable the whole chain becomes.

1340

The Chair: Mr Hudak.

Mr Hudak: Thank you very much, Linda, for an excellent presentation.

One of the points I want to zero in on, and we'll hear this theme over and over again today: If we want to

preserve the farmland, we need to preserve the farmer, which is a piece that's currently missing. Hopefully we'll see that develop at the same pace as the legislation. Can you get into some specifics of what kinds of supports are needed for the grape industry or for agriculture as a whole: VQA stores, shelf space at the LCBO, marketing programs?

Second, in terms of the definition of what is agricultural use: I think Vincor is going through some problems right now for a crush facility that's in an operation described as commercial. It's in support of Le Clos Jordan in Lincoln—maybe I've got it a little bit wrong. What I worry about is that something could be defined as industrial/commercial use when in fact it's there to support agriculture.

Ms Franklin: Right. I don't know much about the details of the Le Clos Jordan project, but it certainly was one of the issues in the NEC review as well. At the end of the day, if you're producing wine on a piece of property, then the crush pads, the tanks—all the things that go together to actually crush the grapes and produce the wine—are ancillary to the agricultural activity on-site. I think you're right that that's something that clearly has to be looked at. At the end of the day you can't bring in grapes at harvest and then truck them off 50 miles to a production plant somewhere. Those things have to be looked at as ancillary to agriculture, absolutely.

In terms of your second question about support to the farming community, again, we're all entrepreneurs in the wine industry, so we would argue that a good part of the answer to your question is that we need to take our destiny in our own hands. We need to produce higher-quality grapes. We need to produce more expensive wines, more premium-level. We need to manage the marketplace as effectively as we can.

But we're living in a world where the reality is that our foreign competitors are extremely highly subsidized: \$6 billion in the EU goes to subsidization of the wine and grape industry. That goes into all sorts of projects, from marketing money to export to Ontario, the single biggest export destination for foreign wines on the planet. It goes into irrigation projects; it goes into distilling projects so there are no surplus grapes.

The United States has just enacted, as you know, a farm bill that has vastly expanded the amount of subsidy, even in the face of free trade agreements with our country that, again, produces money for irrigation, for research projects.

We're facing an issue, as you folks know, around the ladybug right now, and we are struggling mightily with government to find some sources of funding to help with that research, whereas in California, facing a problem with a beast called a glassy-winged sharpshooter, state and federal governments can't throw money at this issue fast enough because they recognize the value of the industry and the need to support research that preserves it and moves it forward.

The Chair: Our time is up. Thank you very much for coming. We appreciate your presentation.

GRAPE GROWERS OF ONTARIO ONTARIO TENDER FRUIT PRODUCERS MARKETING BOARD

The Chair: The next presenter will be the Grape Growers of Ontario. Welcome, Ms Zimmerman. As you are probably aware, you've got 20 minutes and you may leave some time for questions. I would like to ask at the present time if we could be brief in our questions and answers because of the time.

Ms Debbie Zimmerman: Mr Chairman, I would like to share my time with the Ontario tender fruit board. Mr Len Troup, the chairman, is here. I'll take the first 10 minutes and allow him the second 10 minutes if that's all right with the board.

Mr Hudak: I appreciate that you're willing to share time. I think it would be important to hear from both of you in the full 20 minutes. If we have the indulgence of the committee members, maybe we can get a full presentation from Mr Troup. They have some issues that are the same and some that are different, Chair. So if the committee will indulge the presenters, it would be nice to have them both. As opposed to having Debbie split her time, it would be nice to have the grape growers do a full 20, and if Len wants to do his full 20, let him do that as well.

The Chair: We won't be able to accept that, because we are scheduled pretty tightly today.

Ms Zimmerman: Mr Chairman, I'd be quite happy to share my time, and I appreciate the member's consideration, because it is important to hear from both organizations.

Ms Churley: How about talking faster?

Ms Zimmerman: I'm going to give that a try, Marilyn.

The Chair: We have both copies.

Ms Zimmerman: I don't want to lose my time to debate, so I'm going to get started.

First of all, members of the standing committee, I do appreciate this opportunity. My name is Debbie Zimmerman. I am the CEO for the Grape Growers of Ontario. Attached to this letter is a copy of the presentation of the Grape Growers of Ontario to the Greenbelt Task Force on March 19, 2004. This brief reflects the culmination of growers' interests generated from a number of consultation meetings, and in particular a town hall meeting that was hosted by Kim Craitor, the MPP for Niagara Falls.

We encourage members of the standing committee to read carefully not only this attached submission but also the work of the region of Niagara's agricultural task force, which has been in progress for over two years. The work of that task force includes all agricultural commodity groups across the region of Niagara. They have put together a very comprehensive position paper which is in fact referred to in the Greenbelt Task Force discussion paper, which I understand has just been posted on the Web.

Vineyard country is a major contributor to the quality of life of many Ontarians, preserving thousands of acres

of land from urban encroachment. The Grape Growers of Ontario represent 17,000 acres and 13 million grapevines. The land stewardship will require tools to support the viability of the grower and the protection of the land. I'm just going to elaborate very briefly on these tools, which are included in the brief.

The right-to-farm legislation is one of the very important tools that recognizes the grower or the ability of the farmer to farm in any given area. I think one of the important things that has been mentioned over and over again—and I'm sure you're going to have it as the basis of your discussion today—is to save the land, you must first ensure the value and the viability of the farmer. That is critical to any discussions for the future.

Infrastructure has been mentioned. One of the things that is important to the growers in Niagara and across Ontario is irrigation and such issues as the mid-peninsula corridor. Just as Ms Franklin has recommended that wineries need to be viable by adding value-adds such as restaurants to wineries, growers also need these particular tools in terms of infrastructure and other things to contain and ensure that they are viable for the future.

Assessment policies, referring to MPAC currently and with the previous government: Many of those policies were detrimental and do not support a value-add on a farm.

Buy Ontario first: A lot has been mentioned about the quality and the opportunity for quality to be built into any of these lands or any of the growers' lands. But we need to ensure that the LCBO recognizes that buying and putting Ontario first on the shelf is critical. Today, you will not find one LCBO store across Ontario that has any more than 50% of VQA shelf space. In fact, I think you would struggle to find any more than 25%. One of the most important things we see for growing quality in our industry is to ensure there is a market for Ontario product. As has been referred to, the economic output of a domestic bottle of wine is about \$3.88, compared to 46 cents from an imported bottle of wine. This needs to be considered as well. Research, marketing and promotion are also critical to the support of any opportunity for farmers in the future.

Surplus dwelling severances as a value-add to the farm is something that also needs to be taken into consideration. The same study conducted by the University of Guelph on severance activity and released in 2002 concluded some of the following things:

—Severances have, overall, declined over a 10-year period and severance policies have become much more restrictive.

—Surplus dwelling severances were not significant, as they did not create any new lots.

All of these particular issues are included in the brief that is before you today. I will ask my colleague from the tender fruit producers to take the rest of the time.

Mr Craitor: My colleague on the other side made a good suggestion, but I know our time is tight. I wonder if we could just maybe, with the indulgence of the committee, give them an additional 10 minutes of time so we

can ensure that you have enough time for some questions. That would be a happy medium. I'd like to make that motion.

The Chair: She's only taken six minutes at the present time, so if he takes another nine minutes—

Mr Craitor: Just in case.

Mr Hudak: These are two very important presentations.

Ms Zimmerman: We're losing our time.

Mr Craitor: Why don't we just do that? If they don't need it, that would be fine.

The Chair: I'm telling you, at the end, some of us have to take a plane. We're scheduled until 5 and if we—

Mr Craitor: I'll leave it to your discretion.

1350

The Chair: We'll keep going. If you want to make a presentation, you have time

Mr Len Troup: I'm sorry I'm such a nuisance. Apparently there was no room for us, and then Debbie very graciously allowed me to share her time. I do appreciate that. I will be very brief in my presentation. It's there for you to read.

I must make one observation. I find it very interesting that in the next 20 years all the available land is going to be planted to grapes. I find that a little surprising, because we have 13,000 acres of tender fruit that is doing just fine. I don't know; I'm trying to figure out what all this means. I guess 20 years from now, we'll all know. The tender fruit business is there. We've been here for 100 or more years. I wouldn't be surprised if we're here for another 100, in spite of some of these dire predictions.

In my presentation there are points made later, but I really would like to highlight three things that basically everyone is going to talk about anyway. We endorse these things.

In the interest of brevity, the first one is that the Niagara region has their task force, which produced a paper, *Securing a Legacy for Niagara's Agricultural Land—A Vision from One Voice*. A lot of really good thinking and a lot of work went into that. We endorse that completely. I believe it will be dealt with by a regional representative later in the afternoon, so I'll let that one go.

Second, the Greenbelt Task Force was not mandated to consider the viability of farmlands to be included in the greenbelt. I understand that in the paper that has just come out it has been accepted as being necessary to deal with viability. We also recommend that an agricultural subcommittee be established to develop recommendations on actions required to ensure that farmers are viable. I can go into a whole list of things on that. We just want that subcommittee to deal with the issue. We don't want to deal with it after the fact. After the fact is unacceptable because we'll get nothing after the fact, and we all know that. These things have to work in tandem, as the previous speaker said.

Third, crops produced in Niagara are unique to Niagara. Many cannot be produced successfully any-

where else in Ontario. Our orchards and vineyards are major tourist attractions and complement our fruit markets, pick-your-own operations and wineries. Our board strongly recommends that Niagara, and especially the unique tender fruit lands, be considered separately from the other areas to be included in the proposed greenbelt. I believe that is also a recommendation in this—I just got it this morning, but some of our major concerns are recommended here. That absolutely has to be done. Niagara is not the rest of Ontario, and we cannot be considered in the same way. Our problems are unique; our situation is unique. Everything is different here.

We're quite prepared to work with any group to work this thing out. Our board is on record as supporting the greenbelt proposal. This is a motherhood concept. I don't think anybody can be against the concept. It's how it gets done that is absolutely critical. It can be done the right way, or it can be a total disaster. I really appreciate your having this hearing so you understand that even though there is a short time frame, theoretically, in getting this put in place, it is such a vital thing. Make sure enough time is taken to get it right the first time, or it won't work. If the farmers aren't on side, I don't care what the legislation says; it will not work.

The Chair: We'll go to the government side. Who has a question?

Mrs Maria Van Bommel (Lambton-Kent-Middlesex): I'd like to speak a bit to the issue of severances and the severing of surplus buildings. I take it from this presentation that you have no objection to the severing of surplus buildings?

Ms Zimmerman: Surplus dwellings, we feel, add value to the farm. I can give you a couple of examples of that, particularly in the area of Niagara-on-the-Lake. Everybody knows that quite often the first severance, the first acre, is the most valuable acre. After that there is a continuing decline.

Niagara does not have large farm parcels. The average size, I think, is about 69 acres. But when you need to grow your operation, quite often it comes with a dwelling. To be able to sever that dwelling may make the difference between whether or not you can actually afford to add that acreage to your existing operation. The difference is, that is an already existing house. Essentially, you're not creating a new lot. You're just putting an imaginary line there to say that exists, and you add to your farm operation.

Mrs Van Bommel: But the person who is then living in this new severed lot—it still is a severed lot; it is a new lot. Earlier, someone mentioned the types of conflicts that go on between people who move into these severed homes and the farming operation that goes on around them. Would you not be concerned that people who move into these homes might have objections to the operation of the farms right around them?

Ms Zimmerman: I think why we call it has to be value added to the farm—we think the agricultural sub-committee, which is being recommended through the task force, needs to define "value added." In a lot of

cases there are generational farms and farm families. In some cases it may mean an opportunity for one member of the family to be part of the farming operation. I think this is what both Mayor Hodgson and Mr Troup have referred to.

You have to be very forward thinking. This greenbelt isn't just for today. We're not only trying to ensure the land is going to be there but the viability of the farm, which often includes a farm family. In Niagara, farm families are still an important part of our economy. We're not yet into large manufacturing farms. Essentially, we still have farm families running the farm.

In many cases there are sons and daughters moving in to take over these farms, and it is necessary, in some cases, to have that home. Adding certain operations—maybe I'm not making this clear; I see the consternation on your face. Maybe Len can synthesize this into a simpler response.

The Chair: I have to go to Mr Hudak. I'll come back to you after.

Ms Zimmerman: He has the same question.

Mr Hudak: I'll be quick. Thank you both. Thanks, Mr Craitor, for trying to give more time too.

Debbie, talk about market access for the grape industry, the VQA stores and the LCBO a bit more.

Len, please finish your answer. Then I want you to talk about the Beaubien report and the supports for agriculture, trade pitting, etc.

Mr Troup: I have to use myself as an example, because nobody seems to understand the consequences regarding these surplus dwelling severances. I am part of a farm family. Technically we are a corporation—you know those terrible monsters out there? We're actually a farm family that operates as a corporation, as most businesses do.

I've been farming for over 40 years, so don't ask me how old I am. In the process of doing that, we have purchased 10 farms. Every one of those farms had a house. In most cases the owner continued to live there. If they were adjacent to us, there were varied ways of doing it. Some of them have been surplus, and we've allowed the owner to keep it, live there, sell it off, whatever. Two of those surplus homes are now owned by family members who actively participate in the farm. Our farm owns no houses. The business is the business; the house is the house. Believe me, it's the only way to do it. You don't want General Motors owning the homes of all their employees; it's not going to work. It's a good business practice.

It's the only way the farming community can accumulate land, because it's already fragmented. It's already out there. If we're going to have viable larger operations, which we must have in today's society to supply the market in the way the market wants to be supplied, we need that tool. We're not building new houses. There's somebody living in that house anyway.

We have neighbours all over the place. We farm more than 25 different small parcels, which were 25 different farms at one point in time. Between owning and renting,

we farm all those parcels. Many of them have been assembled, and there are houses still there. We get along with all the neighbours, but we have the land base.

If the farmer cannot own the land base, he cannot make long-term plans. This isn't grains and oil seeds; this isn't a cash crop. This is something where you need at least a 10-year plan and you should have 20. If you don't own it, you're not going anywhere.

1400

The Chair: We have two minutes left. Ms Churley.

Ms Churley: Thank you very much for your presentation. It was very helpful. I would like to understand a little bit more. Severances seem to be the theme here, and I think I have a better understanding now of what you mean.

Given the legislation before us today—as you know, this is just the framework legislation and the real work begins after that—what is your opinion of how this legislation should be structured so that future severances can be stopped? Is there anything you can see about doing some of the—I'm not talking about what you're referring to as value added to the farm, but the overall severances. What do you want to see happen to stop them, and can some of the land that's already been bought up be reclaimed?

Ms Zimmerman: I'm going to date myself here. I was involved in 1989 when your government presented the concept of an agricultural easement program—Len can refer to that, because he was part of it. The concept was well received. However, it didn't move forward because there was a change of government. There is still some opportunity to review and look at farm agricultural easements—call them what you want—as opportunities.

I think the main message I'd like to leave with you today is about the viability of the farmer on the land, which must come first. I think it's been stressed over and over: Don't refer to this as just a land use exercise. You have to remember that these are farm families. We are not talking corporations; we are talking corporations in the definition of families. In fact, you could displace and eliminate, for the sake of achieving what we think is already being achieved here in Niagara, with opportunities through farm stewardships by preserving these lands. You have to ensure the viability first. Whether we refer to them as easements, which may be the alternative to severances in terms of the opportunity for the future, farm families don't have the same luxuries as we do with government pension plans or other opportunities. Their only option is a retirement severance. Niagara-on-the-Lake probably has one of the most restrictive policies based on age and years of farming. So there may be other ways in which to craft the same opportunity, whether it be through a land easement program.

The Chair: I'd just like to say that if Mr Troup would like to make a presentation in Toronto or Aurora, there is probably some time available. All you have to do is contact the secretary's office.

Mr Troup: I'll take it under consideration.

The Chair: Thank you very much for your presentation.

FLOWERS CANADA (ONTARIO) INC

The Chair: The next presenter is Flowers Canada, Dr Irwin Smith. Thank you very much for taking the time to come. As you know, you have 20 minutes. You can take the whole time or leave time for a question period at the end.

Dr Irwin Smith: Thank you, Mr Chairman and members of the committee, for giving us time to speak here today. We're in partnership with many of our other agricultural commodity partners, and I'm not going to reiterate a lot of what they've said. We believe in many of the same principles, and the success of the individual farmer is obviously key to the whole thing.

The floriculture industry is a somewhat unique industry, but it is an integral part of horticulture and the horticultural package which occurs on many farms. It's a key component of the greenbelt study area and as such should be included in any consultations and any new act. We have been concerned that until now there has been no opportunity to make input, and we're very glad that this opportunity has happened today, albeit at very short notice.

The growing of flowers in greenhouses is recognized as an agricultural practice in many statutes within the federal and provincial governments. This is a conception I really want to clear up, because it comes up time and again in planning, rate and tax issues. Greenhouse farming is agriculture, no matter what way you look at it. The soil is just as important to somebody in a greenhouse who grows chrysanthemums as cut flowers in the soil as it is to anybody else who needs the soil to grow a crop. We do have other practices in greenhouses where crops are not grown in the immediate soil but in a medium like peat. But in terms of laws with respect to labour and many other laws which exist, it is all part of agriculture.

In most cases, you will find that a floricultural enterprise is part and parcel of a diverse agricultural business, including the growing of grapes, fruit trees, vegetables and ornamental and nursery crops. I would just add that the ornamental and nursery representatives did not hear about your hearing or have not heard about it yet. Tony DiGiovanni sends his apologies, but I think they will be interacting with you at a later date. We often stand together with them as an ornamental and nursery industry.

Horticultural producers use the diversity of different crop production practices as a risk management tool in their agricultural businesses. They construct greenhouses as a risk management tool as well. It's a considerable investment in taking out the climate factor and being able to do that by investing in computers, heating systems and that kind of stuff. So really it's a risk investment.

I'd like to reiterate that farmers make production decisions based on market forces, no more so than in the horticultural sector which exists here in the Niagara region and in the greenbelt area. Farmers are good stewards of the land—it's their livelihood—and they make these decisions based on different forces that exist.

So being able to change from one horticultural crop to another is part of the business, and they will have a diversity of crops so they are managing risk with respect to changes in climate and market conditions.

The floriculture industry itself is made up of many components, all of which are successful businesses employing large numbers of people, generating wealth and paying taxes. It is a free enterprise business almost to the nth degree. There are no marketing boards which control the marketing of crops or pricing. There is free enterprise and free competition, not only here but across the border with the United States.

In the Niagara region alone, the regional impact study reports that 42% of agricultural income is generated by the greenhouse industry. Since about 90% of that is flowers in this particular region, nearly 42% of agricultural income is generated from floriculture. This amounts to some \$250 million worth of income, produced by 265 producers in the Niagara region on 420 acres of land. So we have very efficient use of land, generating a large amount of farm gate and employing a lot of people. This represents about 30% of the gross farm receipts in Ontario being generated in the Niagara region by the greenhouse industry. It doesn't take into account what's happening in Leamington and other areas. This is the most important area for floriculture crops.

We would estimate that the number of employees in the industry in the greenbelt area is about 10,000. Greenhouses result in stable communities. You can't move them around. They have great employment opportunities for people of all ages, and they are usually close to home. They can work very flexible hours if they have children and need to attend to them at different times. Many are retired people working in greenhouses at hours which they can easily afford.

The greenhouse industry is a global business. There is product moving around the world at a rapid rate in all directions, and that is exactly true for this area here. It is becoming part of a huge global business, and this region is extremely important in that global concept. We often move crops backwards and forwards two to three times across borders before they are eventually sold to the consumer.

1410

The Niagara region impact study has reported that Ontario is North America's third-largest greenhouse floriculture producer, behind California and Florida. That is a huge amount of business being carried out.

We would submit that in the Golden Horseshoe, good regional planning has resulted in well-planned and maintained horticultural farming operations with minimal risk to the environment. We applaud good regional planning and would like to be part of it, and have been, in the different towns and cities in the region.

Greenhouse operations use water highly efficiently, and recycle waste water by using recycling systems. All modern systems have zero runoff; in other words, no water leaves the property. Anything that is used to water crops which is not taken up by plants is captured and

reused in the system. In such systems, the water use per square foot may be lower than that of an average household. I think it is wrong to claim that greenhouses are using up a lot of water and wasting it.

We are currently challenged by high energy costs—a 30% increase in the last three years—and the exchange rate, since 70% of our production is exported. At the same time, we import 70% of the cut flower requirement of this country, again indicating the huge global trade that is occurring in the floriculture industry and what goes with it.

We're concerned that there isn't the proper infrastructure in place related to moving product more efficiently, especially at the border, where we're extremely challenged. We send about 200 trucks a day over the border, worth \$20,000 each. That's about \$4 million of product a day moving back and forth across the border. We don't have a product that has any shelf life. If it doesn't reach its market that day, if it's stopped at the US border for any time and for whatever reason, we cannot resell that product or remarket it. If the truck comes home, that's a loss. We are working very diligently with our US counterparts to put things in place so that there are not plant health issues that prevent our products moving across the border in different directions. In fact, we had a meeting yesterday at the consulate in Buffalo with US officials, which we are doing on a regular basis.

Integrated pest management systems have minimized the use of pesticides. There are very minor amounts of pesticides used in our industry, and biological control where bugs eats bugs is the general way of life in a greenhouse.

Why are we concerned about the process being used to develop a greenbelt policy? I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you today; this is the first occasion we have had to participate. We are concerned that outsiders are making recommendations and decisions on behalf of the greenhouse farmers in the region. We request that agriculture—in particular, floriculture—be part of those discussions.

We're concerned about restrictions being placed on greenhouse construction and the planning issues around greenhouses without consultation. We are not against, but support, good planning. But we ask that we be part of the planning process. There is, and will be, further urban conflict with agriculture, such that agriculture will always be challenged by urban sprawl, but it can be managed if it is done properly, with proper consultation. Regional planners must understand agriculture's needs and that agricultural development is just as necessary as urban and environmental use development.

Agricultural operations can't be burdened with high industry planning and development taxes or they'll soon be going out of business and we'll be losing jobs. We find we are diverting more and more resources to dealing with government. There are operations that require almost full-time employees simply to deal with different inspections that take place on a daily basis: looking at records etc.

Too often we find ourselves responding to changes in planning and taxes at the town level—for example in Milton, where we had to defend one of our members, and again in Lincoln and in different places—without there being coordination at the central government. We would like to see some of that better coordinated.

That's all I have to say. We will be making a written submission at a later date; we will not be putting it in today. I thank you for your time and for listening to us. I would extend an open welcome to any of you who would like to visit some of our operations to make arrangements with me, and I would be happy to take you around.

The Chair: Thank you. We have nine minutes left. I'll go to Mr Hudak first.

Mr Hudak: Thank you very much for the presentation, and we look forward to the detailed written presentation. Hopefully other members of the industry will be able to present at other dates. Initially, the hearings weren't coming to Niagara, and I'm pleased that they finally have worked out and a number of Niagara stakeholders are here.

The item I worry about with respect to the greenhouse industry is how it is defined as an industry and how that may change down the road. This bill, if passed, gives the minister the authority to basically define what uses are allowed outside of the urban boundaries. He can potentially decide if a greenhouse fits with the current definition of non-agricultural, commercial or industrial. Are you satisfied right now that under MPAC, or definitions of the Planning Act, the greenhouse industry, which I see as agriculture, is protected and defined as agriculture, so it doesn't find itself put in an industrial category and therefore ineligible to grow in Niagara?

Dr Smith: I think there's always a danger of being put in that category, and that concerns us greatly. I'm happy to give a document to this committee that outlines many legal cases where challenges have been made against the greenhouse industry as being agriculture. I'll be happy to share that with you. We will always argue that greenhouse culture is agriculture.

Mr Hudak: If you could, please get that to the clerk and she can share it with me.

Dr Smith: I have a copy with me now. I'll leave it with you today.

Mr Hudak: The other thing that I find troubling about the bill is the amount of power that goes to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs in his office, in terms of the definitions. The minister could amend the urban boundaries. The minister could help determine whether something is agricultural or not. What degree of comfort does Flowers Canada have with ministerial power versus local councils that would administer definitions? Where do you think the balance of power should lie?

Dr Smith: I think that when the Niagara regional task force was created to look at the economic impact of agriculture, the discussion came up: How do we define agriculture? After that report was written, there was a subsequent committee, which I think may still be functioning, set up by the Niagara region risk assessment

committee. I believe that committee has been struggling with, again, what is the definition of agriculture? I don't think that's sorted out yet. We are extremely concerned about it, and we need the definition to be written the right way.

I agree with the mayor of Lincoln that, at that level, they have done a great job in representing the issues on the table. I think Lincoln, above all, has probably struggled more with the greenhouse industry issues, but good representation and good consultation have always taken place, which has led us to the industry today and the success that it is, and in a well-managed way. Greenhouses are well spaced, they are well planned; everything about them is good. Very different from Leamington—I'm not here to make those comparisons, but if you've been to Leamington, you'll see what it's like, with wall-to-wall greenhouses.

The Chair: Ms Churley.

Ms Churley: Thank you for your presentation today. I recognize, as we all do, it's very short notice and difficult for some to be prepared today. But your presentation was informative. I understand you are saying that you support moving forward with some kind of legislation that protects agricultural and environmentally sensitive land, but that your concerns are around what your role is in the greenhouse business or how you're defined within any legislation coming out. As well, you're concern, as I understand, about some of the other issue raised around severances and the loss of agricultural land. Would that be a fair assessment of what you just said?

Dr Smith: I think we support all the other agricultural groups in their thinking. As I said to you, many of my members are also members of the grape industry. There are members of the tender fruit board. They all have diverse operations, growing many agricultural crops, and a greenhouse is one of those.

Ms Churley: So you would support moving forward with the legislation. You would want to make sure that you're consulted and your industry is consulted.

Dr Smith: Absolutely. I think that's an absolute requirement.

Ms Churley: OK. Thank you.

The Chair: The government side.

Mr Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): I'd like to thank you very much for an interesting and informative description of the greenhouse business. I've got two brief questions, more in the realm of clarification, I think, of some of the points that you've made.

You were talking earlier about the flower business, and for my own interest you talked about flowers crossing borders and the business of importing as well as exporting them. Can you give me an idea, using the old 80-20 rule, what 20% of your product—local domestic product here in Ontario or Niagara—makes up 80% of exports and, conversely, what type of flower would make up around 80% of our imports?

1420

Dr Smith: I'm not exactly clear on what you're asking me. It's a very diverse industry. We grow something

like 350 different crops. It's very diverse. On the cut flower side you could say that roses, Ulster Mary, gerberas and snapdragons constitute the major crops. When you go to the pot plant industry, it's huge. Your two main ones are poinsettias and chrysanthemums. But around that there are another 250 different varieties and types of crops being grown, and if you come down to cultivars, there are thousands. It's a very fast moving, dynamic industry. The breeding situation in the world is so dynamic that there are new crops being developed and patented literally by the minute. We pay royalties on everything we propagate. On every cutting you put in a pot, you're paying a royalty to the breeder.

Mr Delaney: You've actually answered the question. I was just wondering if there were any trends or clusters that would define a rule of thumb. What other areas in Ontario support a viable greenhouse industry?

Dr Smith: Leamington is the major one. You will find floriculture greenhouses spread out all the way through the greenbelt. There's quite a bit around Kitchener-Waterloo, even heading up north of Guelph, but the major areas are this region and the Leamington region. It just happens that the Leamington area has many developed in vegetable crops, and they're centred around tomatoes and cucumbers. There are still quite a few big flower growers there too. It's mainly the climate. The uniqueness of the climate is just as important to greenhouse people as it is to anybody else. That's why they're situated where they are.

The Chair: We still have about 40 seconds.

Mrs Van Bommel: You mentioned when you started out that you felt you hadn't been engaged. I was just going to tell you that the Ministry of Municipal Affairs will be doing public meetings and stakeholder meetings. One of them is here in St Catharines on June 10. We are trying to hear from everyone and give everyone the opportunity to participate in this discussion, because we do understand that this legislation has a significant impact on this area.

Dr Smith: Thanks very much for that. We have seen the list of the meetings, and we will be making representations as well.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr Smith.

CLEAR THE AIR COALITION

The Chair: The next group is the Clear the Air Coalition, Mr Rob Burton. Thank you for taking the time to address the committee on this very important issue on the greenbelt. You have 20 minutes, of which you may leave some time at the end for questions.

Mr Rob Burton: Thank you, Chairman Lalonde. I appreciate the opportunity.

Clear the Air Coalition started in 1999. Since then, we negotiated environmental controls on the proposed Winston Churchill Boulevard fossil-fuelled electricity generating station now expected to be operational in 2007, right next door to a residential neighbourhood.

We worked to control growth in Oakville by participating in the official plan amendment 198 process for north Oakville. We appealed that amendment to the Ontario Municipal Board and led the negotiations that produced the settlement of that policy hearing in 2003. We created the Citizens' Environmental Advisory Committee in Oakville to compensate for the town's refusal to have one. That committee has already produced A Greenprint for Oakville, a draft environmental strategic plan. Perhaps the title will be a touch more meaningful to you if I tell you that the town of Oakville is busy conducting its massive urban expansion under the title A Blueprint for Oakville. I think that nicely captures the state of denial that the town of Oakville's power structure is in about the deadly air pollution we suffer and their lack of regard for green space. Yesterday was the first smog day of the year, a month earlier than last year, and Oakville was the worst.

We also provide advice and support for other community groups dealing with lakeside algae infestations from overburdening Lake Ontario with phosphorous from uncontrolled growth and inadequate sewage treatment, as well as concerns about noise pollution and other consequences of poor planning.

We are about to become involved in the last dirty secret of what passes for urban planning in Ontario, the fact that all of it proceeds without an iota of concern for where we're going to put out the trash.

Everywhere we look, our members have discovered reasons for dismay and action. That's why we're here today. Every issue that has drawn us in has increased our concern that the public good is insufficiently considered in urban growth plans. In fact, we shake our heads and ask, "Why do they call it planning?"

CTAC was created as a coalition of 10 ratepayer or residents' groups in Oakville and Mississauga in 1999. We were and are concerned that our area now has an air of death created by our congestion and bad planning. Our region's medical officers of health have confirmed the Ontario Medical Association's estimates of the death toll from the burden of air pollution. In Halton, which is where Oakville is located, it is 55 unnecessary or premature deaths a year. Asthma is now a childhood epidemic. Nevertheless, our developers and the politicians they fund to front for them continue in denial and hope to outlast our efforts to bring them under control.

Instead, I'm delighted to tell you we have grown stronger, and I believe we will continue to do so. Our many thousands of residents helped change the political colour of our area's two provincial ridings from blue to red in the last provincial election. In Mississauga South, our members helped replace Margaret Marland, who everyone said could never be defeated, with Tim Peterson by a tiny margin of 250 votes. In Oakville, Kevin Flynn won 23,000 to 19,000 after a long and respected career as sometimes the lone municipal politician standing up to the majority on Oakville's council that the Globe and Mail described as "Ann Mulvale and her sprawl-happy council."

A few weeks later, I came close to unseating Oakville's mayor with a margin of 6 or 12 or 15 or maybe 29 votes, depending on which day you count them. Next time, at the rate we're going, the election will be over whether we have to control growth better, and the answer will be overwhelmingly "yes."

Voter concern has not been temporary on this issue. Voter concern changed the provincial government, and voter concern is shifting the ground at the local level too. We did manage to elect three more council members than before who don't want to lie down for every demand the developers place before us and don't want to run away like cowards from every threat to take them to the Ontario Municipal Board.

My opponent didn't campaign, by the way, on a pro-growth platform. We did not have a referendum for or against growth. My opponent's campaign theme was that there is nothing we can do about it and we have to just suck it up or the OMB will force it on us. If you like, it was a claim of helplessness.

What I think is important to look at is that her vote sank from 22,000 to less than 16,000 as a result of our campaign to control growth. Essentially, Oakville's voters have just about deadlocked, 15,758 to 15,730 in the last count, not on whether we should fight for better control of growth, but on whether we can.

We have an area that we believe fits your mandate, even though your task force leader, Burlington's mayor Rob MacIssac, who voted as a member of Halton's regional council to urbanize north Oakville, has been quoted in the press as saying that because north Oakville has already been urbanized, has already been designated urban, it can't be considered for the greenbelt.

We respectfully disagree with his opinion. Today, I'm here to ask the Legislature, among other things, to please include north Oakville in the greenbelt study area. If you can't or won't do that, we—the citizens' groups, the town, the region and the province in the form of the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and the Ministry of Natural Resources—have identified approximately a third of north Oakville's 3,000 hectares as comprising a coherent natural heritage system. This area and the 400 hectares that the province already owns and calls the North Oakville Land Assembly, at a bare minimum ought to be included in any calculation and creation of a greenbelt. We beg you to do it.

1430

Today, the developers and those who serve them on the councils in the municipalities in Oakville are challenging this so-called interagency review. They are fighting the natural heritage system identified for the north Oakville urban envelope. They falsely claim the only way we can have a natural heritage system is to buy it. They seek to take away from the province, from government the power of land use designation by that kind of claim. They claim that because we have to buy it and we can never afford it, they might as well pave it. They allege we do not have the planning tools to achieve such a natural heritage system. I think they all need to

check their passports. I think they're asserting an American concept of private property rights that's not in step with the more balanced Canadian values on this point.

I began with a description of the political impact of my area's concern about sprawl and pollution on the political colour of the two ridings in the area, because I want to underline to you today that we got the IAR agreement and the identification of the natural heritage system that's now in contest under the previous government. What we didn't get and what we were promised were the means to make the interagency-reviewed and -agreed natural heritage system happen. So we're here to look to you to strengthen and not weaken our hand in these matters.

We didn't vote for Liberal members in the hope that we would get pale imitations of Tories. We didn't vote for Liberal members in the hope that we would be subjected to a watering down of what we had achieved with very hard work over the previous four years. What we did vote for was action on the planning deficit, the refusal in previous years to recognize and deal with all the costs of growth and to see that they are fairly allocated to those who benefit from growth and to stop inflicting those costs on us who suffer from the growth.

On April 2, we therefore joined with 41, now more than 50, other health, environmental and community groups to create the Ontario Greenbelt Alliance in support of efforts to create a greenbelt in the so-called south central planning area of Ontario, not just the Golden Horseshoe. I was among the founding members of the alliance who launched the initiative at a Queen's Park press conference back in April. Alliance members congratulated the McGuinty government on the introduction last December of its proposed Greenbelt Protection Act, which we hoped would help counter the damage from ill-planned urban development, but we warned that the proposal would fall short of what we really need if it fails to adopt amendments to make the protected area larger, greener and stronger.

The alliance and Clear the Air are seeking amendments to Bill 27. We want the 10 most-threatened hot spots of biodiversity and headwaters added to the study area and protected from development so that they can be included in the greenbelt. The greenbelt alliance will be writing you to give you the list of the 10 hot spots. We want the greenbelt study area larger than now envisioned so that it can contain urban sprawl, reduce increases in air pollution, enhance water source protection and biodiversity, and slow the degradation of our quality of life.

We want the greenbelt study area to protect from incompatible highway construction plans that appear to be on a fast track for approval. The Ontario Greenbelt Alliance believes that if the greenbelt is done right, we can look forward to a natural heritage system for Ontario that would link the Niagara Escarpment, the Oak Ridges moraine and the Algonquin Park-Adirondack Park axis. We call that the NOAH natural heritage system.

Clear the Air congratulates the present government for moving quickly on its election commitment to establish a

greenbelt that protects at least 600,000 acres of land within the Golden Horseshoe. The present development moratoria, enacted through the December ministerial zoning orders and, we hope, Bill 27 will provide time to study the concept of a permanent greenbelt and properly implement such a concept in legislation.

Clear the Air endorses and recommends to you four specific changes to Bill 27:

(1) The legislation should have an explicitly stated purpose section indicating that the greenbelt is intended to become part of a larger connected network of protected areas across the province.

(2) Bill 27 should be amended to add a clause placing planning and approvals for all new highways and major infrastructure in abeyance. The ban should cover extensions of 400-series highways, expansions of the capacity of existing 400-series highways, and extensions or expansions of municipal roadways of equivalent size—four lanes or more—in the greenbelt study area that you identify in schedule 1 of the bill and that we hope you'll expand to include the little additions that we're here to talk about today. In particular, no applications or granting of approvals under the Planning Act or the Environmental Assessment Act for such projects should be permitted during the study period.

A similar provision should be added, we think, regarding the approval of extensions or expansions of sewer and water infrastructure beyond existing settlement areas in the study area under the Ontario Water Resources Act and the Environmental Assessment Act, except where such infrastructure is required to service existing dwellings in the study area.

(3) The greenbelt area is too small. It fails to encompass the same area as the Central Ontario Smart Growth Panel did. We believe it fails to take into account the relationship of a permanent greenbelt for the Golden Horseshoe to the rural lands elsewhere in the province. At a minimum, we believe Bill 27 should be amended to include Simcoe and Wellington counties in the study area. Leapfrog development attempts by developers in Simcoe and Wellington were already well underway before the greenbelt order and, unfortunately, the scope of the order has fallen short of containing these cases of runaway bad planning.

(4) Urban boundaries on the Niagara Escarpment should be frozen. Schedule 2 of Bill 27 should be amended to remove the reference to the Niagara Escarpment planning area.

Clear the Air appreciates very much having had a chance to share with you our views on this important bill. My town's member of the Legislature, my friend Kevin Flynn, told the second reading debate in April that the province owns more than 1,100 acres of prime greenbelt-type land in Oakville. We hope that he and you will take the necessary steps to keep that land in public ownership and not sell it off to developers as the previous government intended. That land is a reminder that protecting open space is, and has always been, so mainstream a concept in Ontario that it's been done before, by the Bill

Davis government in the 1970s. They called it the parkway belt, but too much of that is gone now. They exempted, removed and sold parkway belt land as well as many another public asset that wasn't nailed down in the last government. Since before that, the province has had the wonderful words "to protect, preserve and enhance" in its planning and development policies. They just didn't live up to them when their developer pals came calling for favours and exemptions. They made it seem like they wanted the province's planning policies to be more of a guideline than an actual planning code of conduct. We in the great unwashed public would like to know what we can count on. We'd like your planning policies to be more a code of conduct than a mere guideline.

Today's government has been elected in part because all around the GTA people have recognized what they've lost over the last 30 years as the parkway belt was frittered away. Voters responded positively to the new promises they heard to create a stronger and better-protected greenbelt. These areas—Oakville, north Leslie, Durham, Caledon, Simcoe North, Blue Mountain and others—are today the front lines of urban sprawl.

In my own community, the province teamed up with the local planning authorities to assure us of a viable 2,200-acre natural heritage system for the environmental and biological features of the north Oakville urban expansion area, the total of which is a huge 7,600-acre tract of land given over to urban sprawl by previous governments. We're not asking you to turn back the clock on it; we're asking you to help us protect the identified environmentally sensitive lands that comprise our proposed natural heritage system. We don't think that's very radical to ask.

We hope Bill 27 will lead to strengthening the tools and policies, and the philosophy, needed to better preserve, protect and enhance a natural heritage system in Oakville and in every other community subjected to the advancing tidal wave of growth.

1440

We're talking about a non-renewable resource here, called the future lifestyle of Ontario. It's clear from the minister's remarks in the Legislature in April that this government understands this fact and is acting on it. He said, "Ontarians need green space, because it improves their quality of life, and a high quality of life is what we were elected to deliver." That's what John Gerretsen said, and we say amen to that. We'd like you to live up to it, though.

I have a speech I give to new groups who ask us to share what we've learned over the last five years. I call that speech That Sucking Sound. That's the way urban growth has been conducted in Ontario over the last few decades. New growth impoverishes existing communities. Established communities lose their community facilities so new ones can be built next door in the new areas. Fire halls close, libraries close, schools close and more which we think is a stupid waste of public capital. Existing facilities, such as landfills, are used up faster than they should be, and more pressure is created to find

them where they can't be found anymore or at least that's the—

The Chair: You've got about 30 seconds left.

Mr Burton: All right. Growth sucks the money out of our pockets and the time out of our lives. We who rely on our assumption that we elect you to look after our interests seem to disappear, and you only hear from the special interests who come to you and beg for special consideration.

I thank you very much. The only thing else I had to say was a joke and—

Mr Hudak: Let's hear it.

The Chair: Thank you for taking the time.

Interjections.

The Chair: Now we're getting behind. Sorry about that.

Mr Burton: It's a 30-second joke.

Interjections.

Mr Burton: Too often planners are working for the bad guys, it seems to us citizens. Let me explain how that works.

A planner dies and goes to hell. When he gets there, he doesn't care for the way he finds Satan has let the place spread out. He persuades Satan he can grow the place faster if he brings in developers and learns to pack the bodies in more tightly by building smaller homes and cutting down on such frills as wide streets and good roads, adequate parking and zoning that keeps homes away from industries. He teaches Satan to start calling it live-work so he can make the sinners think they're getting something new and different that can't be judged by any previous expectations.

Satan rewards the planner with higher pay and lots of junior demons to boss around. Satan lets the developers build themselves giant estates with huge homes far from the new high-density developments they build so they don't have to see or hear the screams of the condemned.

The Chair: Thank you, but I have to—

Mr Burton: One day God calls Satan to mock him. "How's it going in hell, Satan?" he asks.

"Hey, things are great," Satan says. "We've got sinners stacked up on top of each other now. My sin taxes are going up."

The Chair: Mr Burton—

Mr Burton: "All my demons are enjoying higher pay. My sinners are more dazed and confused than ever."

God says, "What? You must have a planner. That's not supposed to happen. Send him up here."

Satan says, "No way. I like having a planner. I'm going to keep him."

The Chair: Please, the time has expired.

Mr Burton: "Send him back up or I'll sue."

"Yeah, right," Satan says, "and just where are you going to get a lawyer?"

Thank you. Once you start a joke, you can't stop. I beg your pardon.

The Chair: We're not here for jokes, though.

Interjections.

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): Did you get the joke?

The Chair: No.

Mr Kormos: Wait. He didn't get the joke.

TOWN OF NIAGARA-ON-THE-LAKE

The Chair: The next presenter will be the town of Niagara-on-the-Lake, Austin Kirkby. As you know, you have 20 minutes. You can take the whole 20 minutes or leave some time at the end for questions from the members.

Ms Austin Kirkby: Thank you very much for the opportunity to address you this afternoon. My name is Austin Kirkby, and I have farmed with my husband, John, a third-generation farmer, for over 40 years.

I have been a municipal councillor for the past 12 years. In fact, I entered politics to represent the interests of the farming community. I am currently the chairman of the agricultural subcommittee and the agricultural irrigation committee for the town of Niagara-on-the-Lake.

I'm here today for two reasons. The first is to impress upon you the importance of saving the farmer and the family farm, as well as the agricultural land base. The second reason is that I am very frustrated by the lack of understanding about the needs of our farmers and their particular industry.

Saving the land is easy: Just put all the restrictions you want in place and the land will be preserved. Imagine the frustration we feel as farmers when we read about the importance of saving the land because it is in the best interest of the economy, tourism or society in general, but there is no mention of ensuring the economic viability of the farmer. The farmer is the one who invests his money with the purchase of the farm, the rehabilitation of the land by removing unmarketable crops, underdraining, replanting new crop varieties and the wait for four years until that investment starts to pay off. The farmer is the one who has, up until now, ensured the preservation of the agricultural land.

Yes, saving the land is easy, but will the land be green and productive to boost the economy and tourism or will it be brown and abandoned?

The farming industry and the farms in particular in Niagara-on-the-Lake, like the region, are unique. Crops like tender fruit and grapes are very labour-intensified and are produced on farms that are much smaller than those in the rest of the province. For instance, 78% of total farm holdings in Niagara-on-the-Lake are under 69 acres, whereas only 25% of the total farm holdings in the province are under 69 acres. In fact, 25% of the total farm holdings in Niagara-on-the-Lake are under 10 acres, compared to only 4% in the province. Total land holdings can, and most often do, encompass more than one farm. Earlier today we heard about 69 acres that most often, could encompass six to seven farms—33% of the farms in Niagara-on-the-Lake are 33 acres.

Regional differences must be recognized. A broad-brush approach to land restriction will be unfair to areas like Niagara-on-the-Lake and the Niagara region because of this.

There have been a lot of articles printed about the disappearance of farmland. I believe the Niagara region, and Niagara-on-the-Lake in particular, have done a good job of protecting their agricultural land. I have enclosed a regional map showing the urban area boundary expansions from 1981 to 2002 that will prove my point. If you just turn your page over, you'll see Niagara-on-the-Lake in the very corner and the black dots are the urban area expansions in 10 years. I think Niagara-on-the-Lake has done an excellent job of protecting their farmland.

There has been discussion about the elimination and restriction of severances because of the disappearance of farmland. A report referring to the Niagara region stated, "There has been a significant decrease in both the number of applications received and the number of lots created each year in agricultural land during the decade". In fact, the numbers were reduced by almost 50%.

I am concerned about the elimination of retirement lot severances but especially about the elimination or restriction of the ability to remove surplus farm dwellings when farmers buy additional agricultural land.

Niagara-on-the-Lake increased their productive agricultural land by 3% from 1996 to 2001, and I believe the stats will prove this has increased even more today. The financial return from the sale of the existing farmhouse by a young farmer when he purchases additional land to expand his operation permits him or her to reinvest that capital back into the rehabilitation of the land. What was once abandoned will become a productive farm, ensuring an economic benefit to the whole community, the region and the province but, most importantly, to the farmer.

The elimination or restriction of severances for existing surplus farm dwellings is, in my opinion, the most crucial aspect of the greenbelt legislation. I believe it will not only curtail the expansion of family farms but will remove the incentive for the next generation to enter the farming industry. A surplus farm dwelling is just that. It is an existing house that is surplus to the farming needs of the farmer, but it has a high financial benefit because its sale provides financial returns to reinvest back into the farming operation.

The Niagara Regional Agricultural Task Force produced a report entitled *Securing a Legacy for Niagara's Agricultural Land*, which outlines what measures have to be implemented to ensure the economic viability of our whole agricultural industry in the Niagara region. The tender fruit and grape producers have also done reports about what needs to be done for those specific industries to be economically viable. These initiatives must be implemented as part of any greenbelt legislation. Requests have been made, including one from Niagara-on-the-Lake, to have an agricultural subcommittee formed to deal with these issues.

As I stated earlier, the farming industry, and in particular the size of farms, in Niagara-on-the-Lake are

unique to the province. Provincial legislation must also recognize this fact.

1450

Before I close, I would like to make some additional comments, if I may. Earlier there was mention of a number of severances. I think the figure was about 5,000. They're not all on agricultural land; in fact, only a very small portion of them are on agricultural land. When severances are created, they're created for six reasons:

(1) A new lot: It's a creation of a farm parcel, where both the remnant and new lot created—or farm; they call it a lot, but it's a farm—are considered to be capable of being a viable farm property. They are capable of being a viable farm property because of the gross dollar value received per acre from an intensive farming industry like tender fruit and grapes.

(2) Boundary adjustments: They do not result in the creation of a new residential building opportunity, but they're listed as one of those severances.

(3) Retirement lots: Niagara-on-the-Lake has one of the strictest requirements. Our official plan states "The applicant has farmed in Niagara-on-the-Lake since the 20th of December, 1973," the date of the adoption of the official plan of the Niagara region.

(4) Another reason is easements.

(5) Surplus farm dwellings: It's very important to realize that these applications separate existing dwellings from farm parcels. However, a zoning amendment is required to preclude residential development of a vacant parcel, and therefore a new residential building opportunity is not created.

(6) The last is an infill severance policy.

When these figures are tossed at you, it's very important that you realize that only through the retirement lot or infill policies can a residential building opportunity be created independent of a farm operation. In fact, the house of one member, Mr Ziraldo, a former owner of Inniskillin Wines, was severed as a surplus farm dwelling when he sold his property to Vincor wines. The winery itself was 18 acres, very much the size of the farm parcels in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

These are stats that are very important to realize. Despite the severances, Niagara-on-the-Lake continues to be one of the most active and important agricultural communities in the Niagara region. It has an agricultural industry that represents 60% of tender fruit and grapes grown in the province, as well as greenhouse and ornamental crops. The grape industry in Niagara-on-the-Lake produces 55% of Ontario's grapes, has a farm gate value of \$25 million and generates \$100 million per year in government income from the sale of wine. The tender fruit industry in Niagara-on-the-Lake produces 60% of the tender fruit in the region. It has a farm gate value of \$24 million, and the estimated spinoff ratio represents \$120 million per year in economic activity from the industry. This is due to the very intensive farming practised in Niagara-on-the-Lake, compared to other areas of the province.

I can't impress upon you enough the importance of recognizing our farm size. With your indulgence, this is a

map of Niagara-on-the-Lake. It's very difficult for you to see. I can't leave it. I've only got one and I don't dare part with it. It shows you how small we are in farm sizes. Niagara region is very similar—Lincoln. We're not anything like the rest of the province. To restrict our severances, with the size of the farm parcel, is only going to hurt our industry. That's the only reason I brought the map. We had it done in the 1990s. There may be some changes but probably not many.

I can't impress upon you more the importance of supporting what has been requested: the addition of an agricultural subcommittee, set up by the province before this legislation is finalized, that will address some of these things. You can't do it with a broad-brush stroke. You can't just eliminate severances or say "only severances of 75 acres." That doesn't pertain to Niagara-on-the-Lake. That will eliminate a lot of young farmers from entering the business, because of the farm sizes we currently or historically have.

There are things our government can do. This is frustrating for me. I'm a grape grower, and I get this. This is one of the latest applications or whatever from the LCBO. You look in it, and there's Australia, Australia, California, Chile, South Africa—oh, one from Ontario. It's not even VQA. It is Ontario wine, but it's not VQA. The latest one, I understand, which I haven't seen—I heard yesterday—has the employees of the LCBO talking about all the areas they like. I don't think we're included.

That, to me, as a grape grower, is the most frustrating thing, to be honest with you. I couldn't resist bringing it. I haven't got a copy for you, but I have provided you with some information to look at. I hope you will. You'll see by the figures that in Niagara-on-the-Lake, even though they're small farms, they have increased their land.

There are articles, unfortunately, by a grape grower in this area. He was offered \$600 a tonne by Vincor winery because his grapes were surplus. This was on November 13, 2002. At the time, everybody else got \$1,775, but he was offered \$600.

There's more information that goes along with it. You can read it at your leisure. It's frustrating as a farmer, but I appreciate the time that has been allowed to me today to present our concerns.

The Chair: Thank you. We have six minutes left. Ms Churley.

Ms Churley: I'm going to share my time with my colleague from here, Peter Kormos.

First of all, thank you. You came very well prepared. Your organization certainly has a good representative.

Ms Kirkby: Well, staying up all night probably helps too.

Ms Churley: I'll bet. It's very well prepared.

I have to tell you, you have two former consumer and commercial relations ministers here from the NDP. I totally agree with you about Ontario wines. It's shocking that still today we're not seeing more promotion by, let's face it, our own government-run LCBO. For the record, I want you to know that I only drink Ontario wines.

Ms Kirkby: I hope it's VQA.

Ms Churley: Absolutely.

Ms Kirkby: Because all Ontario wine—

Interjection: Is not equal.

Ms Churley: Exactly. I agree. I understand, and I support you on that. You have my full support on that.

Just very quickly, because I know Peter wants to ask a question on the severances. It seems that is the controversial issue here.

Ms Kirkby: That's why I added some comments.

Ms Churley: Yes, and I understand that. I think that the overall concern is making sure we conserve the land for agriculture, however it's done. That's the bottom line. I don't think we have any disagreement on that.

Ms Kirkby: No. My point is that surplus farm dwellings don't take anything more out of agricultural land. That's the important item that I think needs to be conveyed today.

Mr Kormos: Ms Kirkby, thanks for coming. There are some farmers over on the other side. I want to raise this issue: Last year or a year and a half ago the government put a representative of the wine industry on the grape growers' marketing board.

Ms Kirkby: Yes.

Mr Kormos: That was, to me—now you may disagree with me—like putting a fox in the henhouse and certainly didn't do the farmers any favours. It really rotted my socks, quite frankly, when it happened. I thought it was a real disservice. I agree with you that if you let farmers make decent livings off their land, they'll be the best and most effective stewards of that farmland that you could ever find.

So now that we've got these—some of them are newly elected. The talk about fox in the henhouse syndrome, with the statutory representative of the wine industry on the grape growers' marketing board.

Ms Kirkby: I think that's been reversed.

Mr Kormos: But talk to them about the practice.

Ms Kirkby: We negotiate for the sale of our grapes. As you saw there, it was \$1,775 for the one variety. But if you have a member from the wine council—and this is who we're negotiating with for the sale of our grapes or the price of our grapes—on our board or our producing board, how can you negotiate? It's a negotiating factor. You can't have them there. That's our biggest concern. The bottom line for us as growers is getting the most value from our crop to cover expenses and make a decent living. That's all we ask.

1500

The Chair: Mrs Van Bommel.

Mrs Van Bommel: I just want to address the issue of surplus buildings. As Mr Kormos has said, I am a farmer. I am a broiler producer. I sit on 50 acres of land north of London, and 50 acres in that area is very small.

One of the things I have experienced as a farmer is that whole issue of surplus buildings and the ability of existing farmers to pay more for that farm because they know they can sever that house and an acre and sell it. That helps them to pay. How do you justify, or how do

you reconcile—that's probably a better word—that against the new entrant, the new farmer who needs to buy that farm but needs to live in the house and is not going to be able to sever that house and sell it in order to help pay a higher price? They, in turn, are competing against the farmer who can sever it and therefore offer a higher price to get that farm.

Ms Kirkby: I think it was stated earlier—and you probably recognize this—that the average farm family now is around 55 years of age. It's their children who are going into the business and, as has been stated earlier, they don't all need these houses. Of course—and I think Len Troup said it very clearly—some of the buildings will not be severed, because they will be needed to live in.

But it's as you expand the operation. I'm chairman of the irrigation committee and I see the lists. We have farmers in Niagara-on-the-Lake who have probably picked up 20 parcels, and you can see the size of our farm parcels. I live on a 12-acre farm, and it's relatively average in Niagara-on-the-Lake. That's what we have. The existing houses are there. No farm family needs 20 houses. That's how you expand the operation. You buy the farm and sell the house back to the original owner of the farm or to somebody new. But at least you're able to capitalize that money back into the rehabilitation of the land. Often you'll buy a farm, and perhaps the reason the farm is for sale is because the crops that are there aren't marketable.

Mrs Van Bommel: How do we handle the new entrants? You talk about family farms—

The Chair: Your time is up, Mrs Van Bommel.

Mr Kormos: Unanimous consent to—

Mrs Van Bommel: No, that's fair.

The Chair: Mr Hudak.

Mrs Van Bommel: Tim can have his turn.

The Chair: I want to run it properly.

Mr Hudak: Councillor Kirkby, I want to thank you very much for the very comprehensive presentation and the support material you've brought in.

I had two points. One, you're absolutely right: If you save the farmer, then you'll save the farmland, and perhaps this committee could look at some amendment to this bill that would not bring parts of the bill into effect until that plan is in place. I'm very concerned that the cart is well ahead of the horse here, that we'll pass legislation and bind everybody in on a wing and a prayer that someday we'll see the farm support policy. Do you think that's a fair point?

Ms Kirkby: I'm a farmer, and I've been one for over 40 years. I certainly support the endurance of the farming industry, but I am concerned if legislation is brought in that, for instance, eliminates all severances. One farmer phoned me this morning, and he wanted to be here, but of course the weather is so nice that he can't be here; it's the wrong time to have these meetings. But they're concerned for their future. They're a young farm family of three men who took over the family farm, and they're expanding like crazy, buying these farms. They won't be

doing that in the future if surplus farm dwellings are eliminated. My concern is, wait until all these other things have been identified besides severances. Severance is one issue, but there are other things that have to be identified—amending the Wine Content Act—for their survival. You can't save the land, have all the grapes in production and not be able to sell them.

Mr Hudak: The other point I was going to make is with regard to your experience as a municipal councillor. Subsection 8(2) gives the authority to the Minister of Municipal Affairs to make regulations—which means it wouldn't have to go to the Legislature, no consultation; it's through cabinet—to define the urban settlement area in a community like Niagara-on-the-Lake, to define what an allowable use is outside of the urban boundaries, for example. How do you feel about an approach where more power goes to the Minister of Municipal Affairs as opposed to being decided by the local council?

Ms Kirkby: I strongly disagree. I think the decision should be made at a local level. As I stated, in the farm size we're all unique. We're different. If you look at our urban boundary, we've actually expanded in a circle to save the best agricultural land. We are good stewards and have been good stewards of our agricultural land in Niagara-on-the-Lake. That's why I brought the map, to show you clearly what we have been. I think our record speaks for itself, and those decisions should be left to local municipal councils.

The Chair: Thank you very much for your presentation, Ms Kirkby. Our time is up.

Mr Kormos: You're in such a hurry to get out of here.

The Chair: We're not here as actors; we're here representing the government.

HAMILTON-HALTON HOME BUILDERS' ASSOCIATION

The Chair: The next presenter is the Hamilton-Halton Home Builders' Association, Fred Toy and Mike Foley. Welcome to the public hearings. As you know, you have 20 minutes to make a presentation. If you take the 20 minutes, there won't be any time left for questions. If there is any time left, the questions will start with the government side.

Mr Fred Toy: I am Fred Toy, and to my right is Mike Foley. I have a prepared statement that I believe you have a copy of, and I would like to go through it with you.

The Hamilton-Halton Home Builders' Association represents approximately 400 home builders, trades and suppliers in the Hamilton-Halton region. In 2003, 3,260 new homes were built by our members. In Ontario, the housing industry contributes approximately \$18 billion to the GTA economy and the employment of over 240,000 people. This makes the home building industry one of the largest employers in the province. Approximately 20% of the price of each new home in Ontario is the result of local, provincial and federal taxes imposed on the housing industry.

The impact of the housing industry on the province's economy cannot be understated. We not only build homes, we build communities and economic prosperity in the communities where we live and work. Because home ownership and the community's built form is so integral to the makeup of our social fabric, any proposed changes to the environment in which housing is planned and built will profoundly affect our society as a whole. It is with this in mind that we provide our feedback regarding the proposed greenbelt legislation and some alternative methods for accomplishing the province's objectives without affecting the equilibrium of the province's housing market.

The biggest challenge facing the city is providing employment opportunities to a population which is slated to increase by 30,000 people by 2008 and to provide an adequate housing supply as the population increases. There currently exists a deficiency of residential land to meet the provincially required minimum of a 20-year residential land supply within the city of Hamilton. This supply can be accommodated by the lower Stoney Creek urban boundary expansion, which currently has the servicing infrastructure in place. However, this land is currently frozen by the minister's zoning order. The city of Hamilton has also identified a deficiency in the amount of land currently designated for employment uses in traditional industrial parks as well as employment lands adjacent to the Hamilton International Airport in support of the city's economic growth strategy in this area. Bill 27, as currently written, will have a devastating impact on the city's ability to adequately manage the housing and employment needs of our growing population.

Hamilton is an economy in transition. An economy which has had heavy reliance on the steel industry and manufacturing is evolving into six new economic growth centres focusing on advanced manufacturing, agribusiness, the Hamilton International Airport, health and biotechnology, information and communication technology, and the film industry. The city and business community have embraced the Team Hamilton approach of focusing the energies of the local, provincial and federal governments to foster the renaissance of the city.

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Hamilton has been a leader in promoting sustainable development by adopting the Vision 2020 sustainable growth vision as the basis for its new official plan. Through its downtown renewal projects and brownfield redevelopment strategies, redevelopment in the downtown core has taken hold, with a 42% increase in building permit activity from 2001 to 2002. Clearly Hamilton is moving in the right direction.

The key to Hamilton's growth management strategy is the GRIDS project—Growth Related Integrated Development Strategy—which will review the integrated needs of planning and infrastructure to manage sustainable growth in Hamilton to the year 2031. This is a model of growth management that should be emulated throughout the province. The GRIDS priorities will be established and

evaluated using the triple bottom line approach, which takes into account the social, economic and environmental costs and benefits of growth-related policies. These policies are to form the basis of the city's new official plan outlining the blueprint of growth management in Hamilton.

It is the Hamilton-Halton Home Builders' Association's position that responsible growth management decisions are best made by local municipalities within the parameters of provincial policy.

Hamilton is putting the tools in place to manage this growth in a sustainable manner. However, the pending imposition of a permanent greenbelt or urban growth boundary will adversely impact our industry's ability to accommodate and manage this growth in a sustainable manner. In the Halton region, the five-year review of the region's official plan has been completed with the recommendation that no new lands be added to the urban boundary at this time. This is significant from the perspective that local governments are making decisions regarding sustainable growth without the intervention of the province.

Urban growth boundaries have been in use for many years, most notably in Portland, Oregon, which is the birthplace of the smart growth movement. The urban growth boundary in Portland was instituted in the late 1970s and has been widely lauded as the prime example of smart growth. The primary objective of the UGB was to increase densities and promote the use of mass transit. It is interesting to note that, for its 30 years of promoting density within the city limits, the population density of Portland falls well below many Canadian cities that have no such legislation.

We fail to see the need to borrow from the American planning experience to institute smart growth when in fact our successes regarding managed growth far exceed those of the United States. Research has shown that affordability and accessibility to housing decreases with the imposition of an urban growth boundary. The Portland experience illustrates an unintended yet very large impact on moderate- to low-income households. Reduction in the supply of available land increases competition for a scarce resource, which translates into higher land and housing prices.

The impact is felt primarily by lower-income families who have now been marginalized by the lack of affordable housing and the requirement to spend more household income on housing. According to the Vision 2020 annual sustainability indicators report, 16% of families in Hamilton are considered low-income. Social housing is similarly affected, given the increase in costs and competition for land. We must ensure that the province fosters a planning environment that allows for flexibility, affordability and accessibility across a wide economic spectrum of society.

It is the position of the Hamilton-Halton Home Builders' Association that the imposition of an urban growth boundary by the province will directly impact the affordability and accessibility of housing for Ontarians

and will adversely impact the home building industry's ability to respond to the needs of Ontario's growing population.

Recent research has shown that the imposition of an urban growth boundary and forced high-density requirements has a negative impact on the ability to manage traffic congestion. The impacts of 25 years of a UGB in Portland are starting to show their effects. The annual urban mobility report published in September 2003 by the Texas Transportation Institute indicates that Portland had one of the highest increases in congestion in the United States, increasing 37% from 1982 to 2001.

In the Hamilton context, traffic congestion is mainly caused by the net deficit in commuters out of Hamilton to find work. The table in your information illustrates commuter trends in Hamilton over the last 30 years. As an example, in 1971, 7,400 commuters; in the year 2001, 23,235 commuters.

Clearly there is a need for more serviced employment lands within the city of Hamilton to provide an opportunity for people to work in the community where they live. As part of the city of Hamilton's economic development initiative, the need for additional serviceable industrial land has been identified. Employment lands adjacent to Hamilton's international airport will also be required for support of the airport as one of Hamilton's economic growth clusters. Clearly, the imposition of an urban growth boundary will have an adverse effect on the city's ability to reverse the commuter flow and ease traffic congestion. In fact, the province's policy will most likely have the opposite effect.

It is the position of the Hamilton-Halton Home Builders' Association that the province's imposition of an urban growth boundary will only increase the problem of traffic congestion in the Hamilton and greater Toronto area and hinder the municipality's ability to reduce the commuter deficit by limiting the growth of serviceable employment lands within the city of Hamilton.

The growth pressure on municipalities outside the urban growth boundary will increase significantly. These municipalities have neither planned for nor have the capacity to accommodate the unexpected population growth resulting from the province's direction. One of the main reasons that Hamilton and the GTA have been able to accommodate the growth is the ease of servicing capacity resulting from the close proximity of Lake Ontario. Municipalities outside the proposed greenbelt currently rely on groundwater, rivers or minor lakes for their servicing strategies. The imposition of this unpredicted growth will undoubtedly strain the financial ability of these municipalities to deal with the need for increased hard and soft services. This is not just sewers and water but also schools, hospitals, police and fire protection. The strain of these increased growth pressures on the social fabric will ultimately affect the quality of life we are trying to achieve for future generations.

There are many instances where parcels of land exist within urban boundaries that have not developed due to economic feasibility or practicality. These include sub-

standard parks, remnants of parcels in old plans of subdivisions, unopened road allowances and surplus lands within the city's real estate inventory. With the increase in land and housing prices anticipated with the imposition of an urban growth boundary, there will be pressure to convert these open spaces into urban uses. Although the effective use of existing land is desirable, such development can destabilize existing neighbourhoods and produce concern among residents about the impact on the built form of the neighbourhood and the impact on the character of the community. Lands not identified in the hierarchy of master parks and open space plans will come under pressure for conversion, to the possible detriment of the existing community.

There is no evidence to support the premise that the imposition of an urban growth boundary will promote increased public transit use within municipalities. According to the study prepared for Transport Canada, *Urban Transit in Canada—Taking Stock*, July 19, 2001, although the absolute number of riders has increased over the years, the numbers of passenger trips per capita has not kept pace with the population growth. It is not anticipated that even with large investments in transit, work transit trips will significantly increase. Clearly, taxpayer dollars can be more effectively spent in building infrastructure to support our growing population and providing employment and housing opportunities within the community.

The recommended vision of managed growth in Ontario is balanced smart growth. The Hamilton-Halton Home Builders' Association believes in balanced smart growth which balances housing needs and the environment, long-term infrastructure requirements and the ability to pay for them, the need to implement controls and the need to provide affordable housing, the need for transportation links, and the needs of communities through which these links are planned. It is our position that there is a need to provide a balanced approach to urban growth which recognizes the need for greenfield development based on Smart Growth principles, intensification of development in appropriate urban areas, brownfield redevelopment and an effective use of infrastructure spending.

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There is no question that Hamilton and the GTA will continue to grow. It is how we manage this growth that is of paramount importance to the province, the city and the home building industry. The province should empower the local municipalities to manage growth in the local context, given a policy framework of balanced smart growth provided by the province.

We do not feel that a permanent greenbelt around the Golden Horseshoe is required in order to protect provincial interests regarding the Niagara Escarpment and the Oak Ridges moraine. A less invasive mechanism to ensure environmental stewardship at the provincial level is required.

In order to promote the revitalization of urban cores, the province must provide assistance to local municipi-

palities in providing incentives for brownfield redevelopment. The assistance involves incremental tax funding and legislative changes which will reduce future liability for landowners who clean up and redevelop derelict sites.

In conclusion, the Hamilton-Halton Home Builders' Association recommends the following:

(1) That the proposed greenbelt be replaced by a less invasive mechanism to ensure that provincial interests regarding agriculture and environmental stewardship are maintained.

(2) That municipalities be empowered to manage growth in accordance with their local needs and reflect the principles of balanced smart growth.

(3) That the province encourage the redevelopment and intensification of downtown cores by financially supporting municipalities with brownfield redevelopment and legislative changes that reduce future liabilities of developers.

I thank you very much for your time.

The Chair: Mr Parsons. We have just enough time for one question.

Mr Ernie Parsons (Prince Edward-Hastings): Your presentation excites me, but not in the way that you hoped for, I don't think.

Mr Hudak: Be nice, Ernie.

Mr Parsons: Well, I farm and I've seen farmland change to houses, but I've never seen houses change to farmland. With these new houses that you are talking about, the people need to eat. In a rural area, farmers have tremendous effect on the land that they farm, far beyond the property they own. They drive it up to the point where farmers can't afford to expand.

I'm an engineer, and I came out of university believing we should pave the world because that would be good for my career, but now I look at the existing urban cities, and these cities weren't planned. There's no city in Ontario that was planned 100 years ago. Do you not believe that we should preserve our farmland, leave the rural areas alone, go back into our existing cities and do it right?

I appreciate your comments about the brownfields. I think there are all kinds of opportunities. I look at the urban areas in large cities in Ontario and I see empty schools. I see an abandoned downtown that I think could be renovated, and leave our farmland alone. I guess I'm surprised at the suggestion that we need to keep going. If we build more highways and pave more roads and build more houses—but the urban areas now are already serviced. We've got the water, the sewers, the schools and the hospitals. We've got everything there. Do you not think there's an opportunity?

I appreciate your business and I appreciate the need for housing. That's the opportunity to work within the existing cities and make them right.

Mr Mike Foley: I appreciate your comments. I think our position is that there needs to be a balance. There is no way that existing brownfield or urban areas will be able to accommodate all the growth that's anticipated over the next 25 years. I believe, in the GTA, we're expecting another 3 million immigrants and people who

are going to be empty nesters who are going to require housing. What we're saying is that there needs to be a balance in responsible greenfield growth. There has to be a renewed emphasis on our urban cores. As was noted by other people today, the best way to preserve farmland is to preserve the farmer. That's a personal opinion. So again, I think our position is more one of balance as opposed to moratoriums.

The Chair: Our time is up. Thank you, Mr Toy and Mr Foley.

Mr Hudak: On a point of order, Mr Chair.

The Chair: On what issue?

Mr Hudak: On whatever I want to talk about, Chair.

Mr Kormos: On whatever he wants.

The Chair: OK, I'll take it.

Mr Hudak: Two points I wanted to make. I wanted to make a formal request for the benefit of all members of the committee. We've heard today about the support for the farmer and types of development that could be allowed—

Interjection.

Mr Hudak: I'm sorry, John. Thank you very much.

The one thing I struggle with when I read through the legislation is, what will be some of the allowable uses of land outside of the urban areas if Bill 27 passes? Sections 5, 6 and 8, and other parts of the bill refer to "urban uses."

The Chair: Mr Hudak, we're here to listen to what the people have to say about the bill. We're not here to pass any motion.

Mr Hudak: It's a simple request for information.

The Chair: A question to the ministry?

Mr Hudak: That's exactly what I'm getting at. Section 1 has definitions of what an urban use is. The definitions are very general: non-agricultural commercial, non-agricultural industrial, etc. Could the ministry supply to members of the committee as soon as possible, preferably by Monday's hearings, a better understanding of what those definitions mean.

For example, we've heard from wineries—whether a winery production facility would be considered an urban use under that definition or not—and cherry pitting operations, for example, the types of operations that support agriculture and make agriculture in Niagara viable. I, for one, just want to make sure that they would continue to be allowed if Bill 27 passes. So that's my request for definitions of "urban uses." I'd like some more clarity on that.

The second aspect: The Planning Act is referred to quite liberally in the legislation in various sections. I was wondering if there was some explanatory material that would be available to committee members for the parts of the Planning Act that are relevant for this legislation so that I could best understand the impact of Bill 27 on local municipal decisions, for example—just a simple request for information, since we don't have the Planning Act before us. I believe it's probably a relatively complex act, and interactions between the two bills.

The last point I had—I know that next on the list is the region of Niagara. I don't see Pat Robson here yet. He

may be arriving shortly. We do have the Mayor of Port Colborne in the audience, who sought to have a chance to address the committee. I don't think he wants the entire 20 minutes of time. The mayor assured me that he had a brief presentation on an important issue on Bill 27. I would seek all members' support to allow the Mayor of Port Colborne to do a quick presentation.

The Chair: I have no objection to that, as long as we keep on time. Is Mr Patrick Robson in the room? No. If there is unanimous approval, I will accept it.

Mr Parsons: Is this in lieu of?

The Chair: In lieu of.

Clerk of the Committee (Ms Tonia Grannum): You can't do that because—

Mr Hudak: I don't think you can deny Mr Robson his chance, but why don't we let the mayor begin?

The Chair: As long as we get on this one on time.

Mr Arthurs: In the absence of the delegation at this point, it might be worthwhile just to check and see whether the next deputation is here and whether they'd like to present at this time.

The Chair: As the clerk just said, we should go on to the next one. If Mr Robson doesn't show up, we'll definitely accept the mayor of Port Colborne at the end.

I have to apologize, Mr Hudak. You were asking a question to the ministry people a little while ago.

Mr Hudak: Yes, I would just like to ask the ministry staff to supply that information to members.

The Chair: That's OK. I've taken that.

Mr Kormos: On a point of order, Chair: I have a question to put the ministry staff as well. As you know, the government has not yet established the requirement that Ontario wine be 100% Ontario grape or Ontario juice. We'd like the ministry to provide this committee with its data on the impact of requiring that Ontario wine be 100% Ontario grape or Ontario juice.

As you know, truckloads and shiploads of Chilean juice, amongst others, are shipped into Canada and become part of what's labelled Ontario wine. Especially with respect to the preservation of vineyards and the grape-growing industry in Niagara, I believe that question is valid to the considerations of this committee. So I ask the Chair to request that the committee be provided with the information, as I have requested.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr Kormos. We'll try to get that answered by Monday, if it's possible; if not, prior to the end of the hearings.

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PRESERVATION OF AGRICULTURAL LANDS SOCIETY

The Chair: My next presenters will be the Preservation of Agricultural Lands Society, John Bacher and Gracia Janes. Thank you for coming. You have exactly 20 minutes to make your presentation. Either you take the whole 20 minutes, or you leave some time at the end for question period.

Ms Gracia Janes: I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to speak to the standing committee.

For those of you who don't know who we are—I'm sure some of you do—and to give you a little flavour of the kind of work we do, I thought I'd give you just a brief introduction and then I'll turn it over to Dr Bacher to read our brief.

PALS is perhaps the sole group in Ontario, if not Canada, that has as its mandate to preserve the best lands in Canada and the industry that relies on the land to keep growing and to feed us. We have fought for land preservation for over 28 years and also to support the farmer.

Our first experience has been when these boundaries here in Niagara were being set. We were the people who were cited by the OMB as being the defenders of the land in the absence of others, particularly the government. The planner who spoke for PALS—the various principles that he put forward were found in the final plan. We won a little over half of the land that was in question.

Also, over the years we have monitored the boundaries and we've gone to hearings. I cite one of the most recent ones. We'll tell you how hard we have to work. We were at a hearing in Pelham recently, where 35 acres of tender fruit land was under dispute. We didn't have a lawyer, but we presented good witnesses—the commissioner of planning was subpoenaed—and the OMB chairman determined that not only did the golf course have the legitimate desire to have that fruit land for a golf complex, but that our regional plan was too strong; it was stronger than the provincial policy.

So we've worked very hard on the land, but we've also worked to help the farmer. One of our most significant achievements was the bringing forward of the tender fruit lands program to the farmers first, and then working with the government, the farmers and the region of Niagara to make that program happen—well, it almost happened. We had it all in place. The farmers were going to be paid to put easements on their land in perpetuity. The government changed, and the program was cancelled. We still have considerable support for that program, and we feel it's an important one because it recognizes that farmers can't be kept out on the periphery until we want to develop their land. Therefore, there has to be some kind of compensation there in the public good, and also that it provides permanence—"in perpetuity" is on the deed.

With that in mind, I'll turn the proceedings over to Dr Bacher.

Dr John Bacher: Thank you. I think the reason we're here today—the former Attorney General of Ontario, Norm Sterling, at the 25th anniversary of the founding of the Coalition on the Niagara Escarpment, indicated that when environmentally concerned organizations hear that governments have taken good positions in the public good to protect the environment, it's very important that the world hear about this. We think that Bill 27, which has the effect of freezing development in Niagara while plans to protect fruit land in the long term are determined, is certainly a welcome measure to our organiza-

tion. As has been indicated earlier, this has really been our whole purpose of being.

Unlike some municipalities and others, including developers, who have criticized Bill 27 and the minister's order under Ontario regulation 432/03 and even asked for financial compensation for lost growth potential, we believe that the Greenbelt Protection Act, and eventually the long-term plan for Niagara, just reinforce the existing policies of the regional policy plan which have been in effect ever since 1982, when it was approved by the provincial government.

Some in the region have asked for compensation for new mechanisms to take growth away from the unique land in Niagara. We feel there is no need for these, and are certainly opposed to one suggested option: the construction of the mid-peninsula corridor expressway. This will encourage urban sprawl and defeat smart growth.

As an aside, only a tiny fraction of the funds to develop this cross-peninsula highway could enable the province to pay for what we consider to be the only permanent long-term protection of the fruit lands: renewal and expansion of the Niagara tender fruitlands program. This provincial/regional/farm-and-PALS-developed program was abruptly terminated in 1995 despite the fact that 65% of the tender fruit farmers had applied for participation, and even in the short term several urban boundaries could have been made permanent through easements on farm titles in perpetuity.

As well, over the years many good planning mechanisms have been developed by the Niagara region and area municipalities and incorporated into planning and servicing documents. These would discourage growth away from the unique fruitlands that the proposed greenbelt seeks to protect. The most wide-ranging are the plans to develop the community of Port Robinson as a future urban growth node. In addition to being incorporated into official plans, this concept is supported by long-term servicing studies. This expansion area is only one of many areas of vacant urban-zoned land that are adequate for future growth.

In point 1 we stress that understanding the freeze is reinforcing the existing policies of the regional policy plan which, as I point out, emerged through a very exhaustive process of deliberation. This took place many years after the region was formed in 1972. This plan was finished in 1982. It was 10 years of debate. You got an elegantly crafted compromise which allowed for extensive room for growth, combined with longer-term policies to redirect growth away from the unique lands of the Niagara fruit belt.

During a lengthy OMB hearing in 1979-80, the concept of the permanent boundary was put forward by the then solicitor of the city of St Catharines, the highly respected Stuart Ellis. This concept was intended to express the principle that in the Niagara region, where urban boundaries are adjacent to lands that are designated unique—tender fruit or good grape—they would be permanent. Future urban expansions would take place only on lands that are designated as good general or rural

lands. These arguments were accepted by the OMB and were incorporated into the Niagara regional plan as an appendix, which is unamended.

Generally, the principles of the permanent urban boundary have been respected for two decades, and the most important urban area expansion to date has been away from the fruit area, adjacent to Port Robinson. As well, using good planning principles, some surplus industrial lands in the region have been re-designated for residential growth, most significantly the development of the Niagara-on-the-Green community in the former Glendale industrial park, where projected growth from St Catharines was redirected to Niagara-on-the-Lake.

As an aside, you heard a lot from a previous presenter about the supposed harm that was done in Portland when similar policies were in existence. We haven't seen these sorts of ills that he spoke about in Niagara.

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The only major breach of a boundary abutting tender fruit land came in 2000, when the town of Pelham was allowed by the OMB to expand on to over 500 acres of land designated as tender fruit in the policy plan. This shows why the greenbelt freeze is needed: to ensure that the existing policies of the Niagara regional plan are properly enforced. Indeed, the freeze directly clashes with what may become the second most significant breach of the boundaries, the proposed Deanfield Farms development in Grimsby.

In drawing the map of Niagara for the greenbelt, what was protected was the unique area. The freeze protects this area from arbitrary decisions by the OMB. One of the impacts of the freeze has been to stay the Deanfield Farms proposal, which had earlier been appealed by both the province and Andrés Wines as a violation of the principles of the policy plan.

Except for Pelham, major urban expansions have been on lands that are of lesser agricultural capability than unique tender fruit and grape areas. This has ensured that even if the freeze was extended to the entire Niagara area, there would be ample room for urban expansion, for well over the normal 20- to 30-year planning period. According to the Niagara regional planning department, there is a capacity for 77,100 residential units within our urban boundaries for the next 33 years, and a projected need for only 58,000 units. There are many ways to show that this is in fact a conservative estimate of the surplus. A population estimate was employed by the region which is higher than that developed for us by the province.

There's about seven times as much industrial land zoned will ever be needed in this period. The Niagara regional planning department has recommended that the density of residential units per acre increase from the current five to eight units per acre to 13. Current figures of land surplus do not take into account the 2,677 acres of brownfield sites that have been identified by the planning department for redevelopment potential.

When the urban boundaries were established on the unique land, the province understood that these were to be permanent and they actually paid compensation to the

municipalities on this basis. The payout was \$4 million, which amounts to \$12.9 million in current dollars. This is not widely known or understood. It would be reasonable for the province to request compensation for the over 500-acre expansion of the Pelham urban boundaries in 2000. In terms of current dollars, this would amount to \$400,000. Many of the areas currently impacted by the freeze are where there is a clash with the Deanfield Farms and may be lands where the province actually provided compensation in these cases.

The freeze does allow exemptions for ancillary agricultural uses. In fact, initially we did not comment on the greenbelt proposal because we were concerned that there were too many exemptions. In response to the planning committee's request for "an exemption process in the Niagara region to assist and guide municipalities on issues supporting agriculture during the consultation period," we noted that there are provisions in the zoning order for exemptions.

In the planning report, they came up with the DPD 32-2004. They indicated, "What are the proposed developments that clash with agriculture?" and they didn't find any. What they found were proposals for urban development, not for uses like a processing facility. It's sort of a folkloric problem that hasn't been documented.

Although DPD 32-2004 lists five proposals impacted by the proposed freeze, this situation has now been changed to four. This is since one of the five, an application for commercial, industrial and hotel use on land near the Niagara District Airport, was rejected by the OMB after the report was printed. In this case, the OMB upheld the position of Niagara-on-the-Lake and the region against this development proposal.

So now there is only the Deanfield Farms proposal, of the four projects identified by the regional planning department as impacted by the freeze, that is actually supported by any municipal government in Niagara. If this proposal were accepted, it would add greatly to the existing surplus of industrial-commercial lands in Niagara.

Two of the other projects do not yet have approval from municipalities. One is a residential expansion in Grimsby which the town has considered to be premature until the completion of its growth management policy. Another is a proposal by the town of Lincoln to expand the Beamsville urban boundary. The town, however, according to the planning department, has not proceeded with the application but rather has proposed that the expansion be part of a comprehensive review. There was a proposed rezoning of an auto recycling business. In this case, no decision has been made by the town or the region.

In conclusion, we are pleased that Niagara's good planning is complemented by the long-overdue intervention of the provincial government carried out through the Greenbelt Protection Act and the minister's zoning order. In other parts of the province, the notion that municipalities should stay within the designated urban limits is new and alien. Here, on our unique lands at

least, this principle has been accepted since 1981, although the case in Pelham shows it has not always been acted upon consistently.

We hope that the passage of Bill 27 and the subsequent decisions as a result of public consultation and provincial planning discussions will lead the way toward our mandated goal: the long-term protection of a significant provincial resource in the public interest, the irreplaceable Niagara fruit lands.

The Chair: Thank you very much. Our time is up. We don't have any time left for questions. We appreciate your presentation, and everything has been recorded.

Our next group is the Niagara Home Builders' Association, Stephen Kaiser and Paul Phelps.

Mr Hudak: On a point of order, Chair: I just wanted to bring up this point again. The home builders are on for 4 o'clock. It's about 10 to 4 now. The mayor of Port Colborne has been very courteous with his time. I'd like to hear from him. Could we maybe get him to fill in this gap until the presentation by the home builders? I don't mean to jump in front of the home builders, but I think they're OK with that. I understand the gentleman from the region of Niagara has been delayed due to an emergency and hopefully will still arrive. Chair, I wonder if I could beg the indulgence of the committee members to allow the mayor of Port Colborne a few minutes to make his presentation.

The Chair: Is that agreeable with the members?

Mr Parsons: If Niagara is still coming, are they aware that they're coming for much less time than they had put their proposal together for?

The Chair: No. He will only be entitled to a maximum of 10 minutes, and then we're on time, because the regional municipality of Niagara hasn't arrived. Are you referring to the municipality of Niagara?

Mr Parsons: Yes.

The Chair: They haven't arrived yet.

Mr Hudak: We're not taking his time; we're just asking if the mayor could step into this gap.

The Chair: It's the only time he could take, if the regional municipality of Niagara is not here, because right now we're just looking at the list. According to what I'm looking at, there are about 20 groups that are going to ask to make presentations. We have to decide. Are we going to say, "You are able to make a presentation," and the other one won't? The only reason that I'm ready to accept that, if the committee agreed to it, is to take the time of the Niagara region.

1550

Mr Hudak: Chair, it's hardly fair to Patrick Robson, the region of Niagara, who by no fault of his own has been delayed. I think all we're asking for is 10 minutes for the mayor of Port Colborne to make his presentation. With respect, when we get back on time, that's just 10 minutes additional.

The Chair: Mr Hudak, if the regional municipality is coming in, even if they are late, they are still entitled to their 20 minutes. We have to take that into consideration.

At the present time, the next group was to be the Niagara Home Builders' Association. Are they here?

Mr Kormos: If I can be of assistance, Chair, if you have a flight to catch, I can get a limo service to take you up to the airport, and the rest of us can stay till we—

The Chair: We were here on time. Everybody was here on time.

Mr Kormos: If you have a flight to catch, though, I can have you taken care of.

The Chair: Mr Phelps is here?

Mr Hudak: What happened to the mayor's time?

The Chair: He's going to have time at the end, then.

NIAGARA HOME BUILDERS' ASSOCIATION

The Chair: Mr Phelps, you have 20 minutes for your presentation. You can take the whole 20 minutes or leave some time at the end for a question.

Mr Paul Phelps: Ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much for the opportunity to address you today. My name is Paul Phelps, and I'm a past president of the Niagara Home Builders' Association.

Our members include builders, renovators, developers, suppliers, design professionals, engineers like myself, skilled tradesmen, most of whom both live and work in the Niagara Peninsula. We work where we play, and we play where we work.

I think I'm even a typical example of a large number of our industry: My great-grandfather was the first mayor of the incorporated town of Grimsby, my grandfather worked for a supplier to the agricultural industry, my father was a builder in Grimsby, and my first job was picking cherries and my second job was working in the greenhouse. I think that's typical of many of our members.

Members of our association play an essential role in the economic and social welfare of the Niagara Peninsula by providing vital jobs, building quality affordable housing, and practising smart growth land management throughout the Niagara region.

Implementation of Bill 27 and the decisions of the Greenbelt Task Force have the potential of having a severe impact on the housing and land development, and hence the economic well-being, of the Niagara Peninsula.

Let me first say that nobody is more concerned about the well-being of the Niagara Peninsula than our association. It's the beauty of the Niagara Peninsula that is one of the major attractions to our customers. Our membership agrees that there are many areas of our very unique peninsula that should remain green and be protected, as many of them already are through the Niagara Escarpment Commission, through the designation of tender fruit lands and through the viability of our farmers, our grape growers and our wine industry. However, we have three major concerns about the necessity of Bill 27 and how Bill 27 is being rolled out, and its potential implications and impact.

The first of these is speed and timing. We have a concern that the speed and timing with which the greenbelt protection bill was introduced was more due to political reasons, as an overly quick, overly reactionary response to the government's frustration in dealing with intense urban expansion north of the GTA and in the Oak Ridges moraine.

This type of swift broad-brush approach is not necessary to provide protection in the Niagara area. We heard from the past speaker that Niagara is doing a good job already in providing good stewardship of our lands. A better approach in our area would be to allow the time that's necessary for proper consultation and planning with various interest groups and the industries and the citizens and municipalities of our area to study where protection is really needed, where it's warranted, how it can be best implemented and what alternative infrastructure is required.

We have a very unique situation in Niagara in that, to a large degree, our current areas available for growth are bounded by Lake Ontario to the north and the Niagara Escarpment to the south. We are not facing a crisis in the Niagara Peninsula, and we don't need to apply crisis management to resolve it.

We are being told that Bill 27 will be implemented by the end of this year, although it is almost halfway through the year and the public input process has barely begun. We feel that forcing quick, reactionary decisions on Niagara, when they are not necessary, will polarize the various stakeholders in our area, instead of allowing them to explore and develop a made-in-Niagara solution which we can all agree on and rally behind.

Secondly, a broad-brush approach is not appropriate in Niagara. We are concerned that, again due to a perceived rush, a broad-brush approach will be used, as it may be viewed as the only solution available in the short term, when it isn't required, isn't realistic and doesn't meet smart growth principles.

From Grimsby in the west to Niagara-on-the-Lake in the east, the Niagara Peninsula encompasses and enjoys the diversity of very small towns and village areas, medium-sized vibrant urban areas and, of course, the city of St Catharines in the middle. Each of these centres has a completely different makeup, different geographical constraints, vastly different levels of infrastructure and different types of lands, industry and agriculture. Therefore, a broad-brush approach to such a diverse area is not warranted and will not be practical.

Thirdly, we are concerned that if a far-reaching greenbelt is implemented in Niagara, the proper planning and infrastructure will not be in place. Currently, the majority of our infrastructure, as I said, is located north of the Niagara Escarpment. Millions of dollars of taxpayers' money and development charges have been spent on infrastructure in the areas bounded by the Niagara Escarpment and Lake Ontario.

Our great concern is that if large amounts of lands are frozen in which areas of infrastructure are already in place, or planned to be in place, funds and changes in

policies will not be available to provide for infrastructure in other areas of the Niagara Peninsula where growth will have to be shifted. Schools, hospitals, sewers, water, hydro and transportation will all have to be shifted to areas where they don't currently exist. This will be expensive and require a lot of planning.

This new infrastructure will require new and major plans and policies to be implemented, and major funding will have to be provided. If proper planning policies and the method for providing this new infrastructure are not provided at the same time as the decision on the protection of lands is implemented, the supply of developable lands will not be sufficient to meet the area's demands, and the land and housing prices will skyrocket, which will defeat both Ontario's and Niagara's policy of providing affordable housing.

Also of great concern to our industry in this scenario is that the method of funding for new infrastructure may totally rely on development charges, because the funding will be considered to be growth-related, whereas in reality it will be due to a social decision made by the people of Ontario; that is, the preservation of additional lands for the future. If development charges increase dramatically to provide for new and expensive alternative infrastructure, then again, housing prices, which are directly affected by development charges, will also increase dramatically. The extra costs of funding new and expensive alternative infrastructure cannot be placed on the shoulders of the housing industry, but will have to be shared by the province's population.

Therefore, in summary, based on these three major concerns that I've talked about today, the Niagara Home Builders' Association has three recommendations.

First of all, slow down. Allow the proper time to let the people of Niagara, which includes the municipalities, the various industries or farmers, agriculture, landowners and the citizens of our area, provide the necessary input to ensure the proper areas of Niagara that require some form of protection receive it. If immediate protection and solutions are required in other areas of the province, don't implement the same timetable in Niagara. Trying to force a quick solution will only polarize our region.

Secondly, don't implement a broad-brush approach in Niagara. Our diverse makeup requires a well-planned, made-in-Niagara solution.

Thirdly, make sure that before any large amounts of Niagara lands are included in a proposed greenbelt area, the plans and policies for alternative growth and the funding formulas for the necessary alternative infrastructure are in place for the areas that growth will shift to.

Failure to ensure that these provisions are in place, and in place properly, will either cause housing prices to skyrocket or cause a severe negative economic impact on the Niagara Peninsula—or, worse, both.

Thank you very much for your time today.

1600

The Chair: We have enough time for three minutes for each party. Mr Hudak.

Mr Hudak: Thank you very much, Mr Phelps, for the presentation. I think you make some excellent points. I think you're right. There was a sort of political birth to this legislation just after the flip-flop on the Oak Ridges moraine. I think the government wanted to get out some bills to try to make up for that.

Interjections.

Mr Hudak: The members across are laughing at that, but I think it's pretty true.

Ms Churley: But that's a good thing.

Mr Hudak: The NDP likes that, but we have concerns—

Interjection.

Mr Hudak: You want to get into a debate. Chair, I'll be glad to get into a debate. We can debate until 10 o'clock at night on this one if you want to.

But you're absolutely right. There are three essential pieces that are missing: first, the framework to support our farmers. If you want to support the farmland, you need to support the farmer, and that's absent from this legislation. On a wing and a prayer, we're asked to hope that this comes down the road.

Second, you talked about the restrictions in the urban boundaries. A town like Lincoln is going to be hard-pressed to afford its infrastructure in the future if it doesn't have an opportunity to grow. What's the mechanism to try to remedy that for the municipalities in Niagara?

Third, without the mid-peninsula corridor to try to encourage growth in other parts of the peninsula, that's going to put even greater pressure on land prices and affordable housing in north Niagara and more pressure on the farmland.

What are your suggestions on how we could remedy that? Are there any changes that you see in Bill 27—perhaps a clause that asks that this legislation not take place until these provisions are in place? What's your advice?

Mr Phelps: That was one of my major points today: In Niagara we don't need to rush into this decision. We have done a good job of managing our land, and we have a lot of very complicated and diverse things that we have to look at. To do something quickly, just for the sake of doing it, is not the right thing to do in Niagara. We don't have a crisis here and we don't need a crisis solution.

Mr Hudak: That's great.

Ms Churley: Thank you for the presentation. You'll not be surprised to hear that I may disagree with some of your premises, although I do agree with some of your assertions around brownfields. The previous government brought in legislation but didn't make the resources and the funding available, as they did in the US, to help with that, and that's really important.

I have to question where your data comes from that protecting green space actually leads to higher costs of housing. When I look at, for instance, the development of new housing in unbuilt-up areas where you have to put in all of the infrastructure, where there isn't public transportation—all of the costs associated with that—the

housing prices are somewhat subsidized for various things anyway, as you know, but also increasingly higher because of that. I guess the question coming out of that, after stating my disagreement with you on some of these things, is, where are you getting your data on protecting green land—I'm sorry, I'm overtired today. I had a late night. I had a very late, good night. The question is, where do you get your data for that?

Mr Phelps: When I came in, one of the first things I looked at was a map, which I think was provided three or speakers ago, of the growth over the last 20 years in the Niagara Peninsula. When you look at that, there really hasn't been a lot of growth of our urban areas.

We are doing a good job of looking at brownfield development. My company, for instance, is developing a brownfield site in the heart of Grimsby right now, and we're working with the Niagara region. The Niagara region is providing policies and incentives to encourage that type of growth. I know that other rural members are also doing that type of development.

Brownfield development on its own will not be enough to provide for the demand on growth that we see. Already, just by the proposal of Bill 27, we're already seeing in our area land prices skyrocketing and people trying to anticipate what is going to happen and where the growth is going to be. That's just typical of what happens when you try to jump in and do protection without properly sitting back and planning for it.

Mr Delaney: I have a number of issues that should be fairly short. You say in one of your recommendations, "Go slow." What time frame did you have in mind?

Mr Phelps: I don't have a definite time frame, but I think that six months certainly isn't enough time for the stakeholders in Niagara to get together and come up with solutions.

I think we're doing a pretty good job already now, and if there are areas of concern the government has where we're not doing a good enough job in the region, the region, the municipalities and the various industries can resolve those issues. Our concern is that if it's done very quickly and just done broad-brush, then it's not going to serve anybody's interests. In the past our industry has worked well with the towns, the municipalities, the region and other interest groups to look at solutions. When we try to do things quickly, everybody becomes polarized and starts only looking after their interest.

The Chair: The time is up now. Thank you very much for your presentation. Everything has been recorded.

Mr Phelps: Thank you very much for your time.

Mr Hudak: On a point of order, Mr Chair: Just following up on the presentation by Mr Phelps and the previous one by PALS, they made a similar point that the region of Niagara and the municipalities are making efforts to define appropriate growth—I think PALS had some concerns about one in particular—but in defining their own urban settlement areas.

Just another request, if I could, to the ministry staff: If Bill 27 passes as is, how would a municipality create a

new urban settlement area or expand an existing one under the act? If possible, I would like to have the response to that for both the lower- and upper-tier municipalities with respect to Niagara or other parts of the province that are impacted.

The Chair: As you know, they don't have to give the answer today, but they will come back to us.

Mr Hudak: I know they work hard and they'll do their best.

NIAGARA NORTH FEDERATION OF AGRICULTURE

The Chair: Our next presenter is the Niagara North Federation of Agriculture, Torrie Warner or Cathy Mous.

Thank you for taking the time to make a presentation to the committee this afternoon. You have exactly 20 minutes. If you take the whole 20 minutes, there won't be any time left for questions. It is up to you to either take it or leave some time at the end. You can proceed.

Mr Torrie Warner: Thank you. I'm Torrie Warner, a farmer representing the Niagara North Federation of Agriculture. We have 1,100 farm family members.

The mission statement of the federation is "dedicated to achieving economic and social viability for all Niagara agricultural producers through strong effective lobbying and communication efforts."

There is a handout too. Have a look; I'm on page 2 right now.

The vision statement is, "To produce an economically healthy, secure agricultural industry in Niagara that will encourage farm renewal through a new generation of producers"—such as myself.

The value statement is, "will maintain a strong, united, professional image to our members, consumers and elected officials."

Page 3 is pretty straightforward, so I won't go through that.

Page 4—I'll just go through this. The Niagara North Federation of Agriculture is an agricultural organization with over 1,100 farm family members. The mandate of the federation is to promote and protect agriculture in the Niagara Peninsula. Niagara offers the most diversified area of food production in all of Canada, and agriculture has proven to be the economic mainstay in Niagara.

1610

The directors of Niagara North have reviewed the proposed Greenbelt Protection Act and would like to comment on the draft report.

The agricultural community of Niagara understands the need to protect our agricultural land base, and we believe we have been team players in the implementation of many programs involving the protection of Niagara's agricultural industry. Our directors work closely with the region of Niagara and have completed several studies, including *Securing a Legacy for Niagara's Agricultural Land: A Vision from One Voice*, and the *Regional Agricultural Economic Impact Study*.

The agricultural industry in Niagara generated in excess of \$511 million in gross farm receipts, \$400 million in direct sales, \$562 million in indirect sales and \$832 million in induced sales. Agriculture in Niagara had a \$1.8-billion effect on the Niagara economy. This is something to be proud of.

There has been some concern about the decrease in the number of farms. Between 1971 and 2001 the number of farms decreased by 1,694 farms. There has been a continued trend toward larger farms due to economies of scale; therefore, an assessment of the change in farm acres is more accurate. Between 1976 and 2001 almost 20,000 acres of farmland went out of production. This is a 7.8% decline, as compared to the 15% decline in all of Ontario.

According to the regional agricultural impact study, June 2003:

“Out of 49 regions, counties and districts in Ontario, Niagara ranks 38th in geographic size. However, with respect to agriculture, it ranks 25th in total area farmed, 11th in the number of farms and fifth in gross farm receipts. It ranks first in value of average gross farm receipts per acre. The average gross farm receipts in Ontario is \$674 per acre,” in southern Ontario almost \$1,000 and in Niagara \$2,195 per acre.

Should Niagara farmlands be protected? Definitely. Should the province of Ontario help protect the farmlands of Niagara through promotion programs, development of infrastructure and the development of a made-in-Niagara policy? Definitely. Should the farmlands of Niagara arbitrarily be frozen under the Greenbelt Protection Act? Definitely not, unless the conditions listed below are incorporated into the act.

Farmers are stewards of the land and will continue to protect the land providing it remains a viable industry.

The vision of the Niagara North Federation of Agriculture is to produce an economically healthy, secure agricultural industry in Niagara that will encourage farm renewal through a new generation of producers. You can freeze the land but you cannot force people to farm it. It has to be mutually beneficial or the whole industry will die.

One of the visions of the Greenbelt Task Force is to sustain and nurture the region's agricultural sector. Their goal is to enhance quality of life by performing an array of functions across the region, including preserving viable agricultural land as a continuing commercial source of food and employment, recognizing the critical importance of the agricultural sector's prosperity to the regional economy. How will the quality of life be enhanced for food producers in Niagara if you dictate what they must produce on their land? Will there be compensation for those who cannot make their frozen land viable? If the agricultural land is no longer viable, will it still be preserved, and why? What rights will the farm owners have after their land is legislated?

We challenge the government of Ontario to work with the farmers of Niagara, not dictate to us. We have the experience and knowledge to make the farmland of

Niagara very profitable, but we lack the resources and research needed to reach this peak. We are willing to work with the government in the development of programs that will enhance the agricultural community. Freezing land is a band-aid solution to a growing problem. If the government is serious about preserving viable agricultural lands, then help us to produce our products with pride and provide us with the tools to make this land productive and prosperous.

The Niagara North Federation of Agriculture will support the proposed Greenbelt Protection Act, Bill 27, under the following conditions:

The land protected under the act is properly defined with a definite boundary, not just land that is categorized as good grape-growing land, and that this definition be science-based—that's the land immediately above the escarpment, and there doesn't seem to be a definite boundary for that; land scientifically determined unviable should not be placed under the Greenbelt Protection Act; protected farms be able to follow the same best-management practices that others throughout the province must follow—for example, the use of pesticides; all training and tools be made available so that farms in protected areas are not at a disadvantage; any and all land declared under the Greenbelt Protection Act be classified as vulnerable to road salt, therefore forcing municipalities, regions and the province to follow the Code of Practice for the Environmental Management of Road Salts—the problem here is that if you drive along the QEW, you will see probably two rows of trees that are without flowers because of the road salt; research dollars be provided to the Vineland research station so that research can continue in Niagara—it is essential that we continue publicly funded research so that the farms of Niagara can continue to prosper; irrigation rights be protected and water-taking for irrigation remain a normal farming practice; drainage programs be implemented so that Niagara farms can remain viable; compensation be given for the loss of farmers' equity; compensation for environmental restriction on an annual basis; a clear statement that farmlands are not open to public access; the public benefits of Ontario agriculture, such as carbon sinks, food security and support for rural communities are recognized; there are no constraints on value-added commodities and agri-tourism, such as taxation; agricultural assessment of value-added facilities are not classed as industrial assessment; land severances of surplus dwellings remain so that farms can continue to grow without the threat of having to become landlords in the process—we're food producers, not landlords, is the meaning there; consistent application of the Farming and Food Production Protection Act, including a clearly defined dispute-resolution process; that the long-term economic viability of farm operations be ensured so that future generations can continue to farm the Niagara lands; the task force's recommendation that a provincial task force on agriculture be created to develop agricultural policies that will ensure a viable agricultural industry and that at least one representative be from Niagara.

The Chair: We have exactly nine minutes left, so that will be divided into three.

Ms Churley: Thank you very much for your presentation. You have a series of recommendations and we don't have time to go through each of them. I agree with you on the road salt, by the way. I'm so glad you raised that. I believe there is a growing awareness, both urban and rural, that road salt is a tremendous environmental problem.

I want to get back to an issue that's come up time and time again this afternoon, and that's land severances. I'm sure you will want to continue on.

Mrs Van Bommel: No, you go right ahead.

Ms Churley: I'm still trying to understand what's going on here. I know the thinking behind this legislation is to protect agricultural land. The concern is that once you start severing, you no longer have a guarantee that that land is going to be preserved for agricultural use, yet you are proposing that severance continue to be there for farmers. I guess my question would be—and perhaps you sort of answered it in another part of your brief where you talk about, “Freezing land is a band-aid solution to a growing problem. If the government is serious about preserving viable agricultural lands, then help us to produce our products with pride” etc. Isn't it a problem that one of the ways farmers can continue to farm is to be almost forced into severing land to be able to continue farming? If you had more supports, would you not then be able to accept this component of the legislation?

Mr Warner: To answer the question, I really oppose this legislation, because—I'm not sure how you say it—I should be able to pay fair market value for my land. Right now, it appears as if we can't do that without this legislation. So in that sense, yes, I support what you're saying. I personally tend not to support severances for an income, but sometimes that has to happen. Does that answer your question?

1620

Ms Churley: I understand what you're saying, that people are sometimes forced to do that for the income. They financially need to sever the land.

Mr Warner: Right, and we're not in the business of being a landlord. So if you purchase a 20- or 25-acre farm and there's a house on it, what do you do with the surplus dwelling? That's the point that we're stating here.

Ms Churley: Yes, I understand. What needs to be put in place so that doesn't have to happen?

Mr Warner: I'm not sure what to suggest. If a 25-acre farm is viable, then that's fine; we don't need to sever the house. But if I can't farm on my 30 acres, I need to purchase more land. But we can't support two families on that, hence we don't need two dwellings. If I rent out the house—I'm not a good landlord—I'm going to have problems. Soon the equity in that piece of property that I purchased is no longer there, hence the bank would foreclose, and I'd lose the property and the farm.

I guess I'm not proposing a solution; I'm just proposing why we want what we do.

Ms Churley: You're saying that there's a problem here, and this may not be the solution. But I think I would still say that there is an issue that we keep hearing about, that farmland sometimes gets lost to developers. That's what this is all about, to try to stop that.

Mr Warner: That's right. Developers are willing to pay a lot more for land than a farmer.

Ms Churley: Exactly. So that's a problem here.

Mr Warner: Yes, that's right.

Mr Arthurs: Let's explore here for a minute, because I know one of the critical issues of this whole process continues to be and has been the capacity for farming to remain a viable business. A number of your comments and recommendations for support for legislation of any sort revolve around the need for either compensation, research dollars, training and tools, farmers' equity or environmental restrictions.

Just take a couple of minutes, if you would, in the time available and explore with us the types of things that farming is going to need, either specifically or generally, in order to stay viable over the long term, with or without this type of legislation.

Mr Warner: In short, we need an income. That's pretty blunt, I guess.

With regards to research, research done at Vineland pertains to Niagara. There are certain kinds of research that can be done in the States or other areas that will still pertain to Niagara. But, for example, if the breeding program is not done at Vineland and the varieties are not evaluated at Vineland or in Niagara, we don't know whether they will survive our winters, the humidity in the summer, the rainfall—that kind of stuff. So that needs to be done here. We would like to see it done publicly. We do support some research at Vineland as growers, but—

Mr Arthurs: You started off saying, “We need to have an income.”

Mr Warner: That's right.

Mr Arthurs: Can you just expand on that in the few seconds we have? That's a common theme. It's a simple statement, but I don't think it necessarily reflects the breadth of what you're saying in any way.

Mr Warner: OK. We either need to, I guess, increase our productivity to be competitive with other areas where product is coming from, increase the price or reduce the costs of our input. It's pretty straight math. If you have \$200,000 worth of product and \$150,000 worth of expenses, you either need to increase the gross income, reduce the expenses, or both to increase your income. If we do that through increased productivity through research, that's one way of doing it. Increasing productivity through irrigation is another way of doing it. Losses such as from road salt, frost damage from berms, restrictions imposed by hydro, wildlife, whatever it is—there are a lot of things that reduce income. Weather is another one, but I don't think you guys can change that.

Mr Arthurs: That's a federal responsibility.

Mr Warner: OK. I'll write my MP, then.

Mr Hudak: Thank you both, Torrie and Cathy, for the presentation and for being here at short notice. I'm glad you had the chance to put together a good presentation.

I voted against this legislation. I think I'm the only one here at the table who did. Greenbelt's great in concept, but a greenbelt on its own is not a protection device. In order to make a greenbelt work, you need support for the farm, you need support in transportation and you need support for local municipalities. One of the challenges here is—I think Mayor Bill Hodgson said it earlier—that the fruit belt has disappeared and it's become the greenbelt. You're trying to marry sort of a parkland approach with farming that's a business, and we can't lose track of that.

I'm very pleased that you brought forward a series of specific items that can help support farmers and hopefully will be taken into an agricultural framework. I'm going to ask you to give me more detail on a couple of these items. First, you talk about agricultural assessment of value-added facilities, not industrial assessment, and part of that was in the Beaubien report. Could you give us some examples?

Mr Warner: I think some of that was mostly in regard to the winery issue. There's also an example, I believe from Georgian Bay, about cold storages. I don't know of any other examples myself—

Mr Hudak: There's sugar shacks, I think.

Mr Warner: Maple syrup; yes, that's right. It's things like this that the government seems to encourage us to do and then taxes us after we've done it. We didn't realize that was going to happen, and it takes the profits out again.

Mr Hudak: What I'm worried about is that some of these things will be left on the wayside. Some things that are in support of agriculture may be forgotten in the definition of these things. If you have a chance later on to give more examples, you can always write to the committee or to me and I can bring them forward.

Mr Warner: OK.

Mr Hudak: The other one I wanted to ask you about was where you say "compensation for environmental restriction on an annual basis."

Mr Warner: I didn't actually write this, but I assume it has to do with nutrient management. Cathy is our secretary here—I'm a farmer—so the floor is hers.

Ms Cathy Mous: I think if we ever run into a problem where we end up being environmentally controlled, then if we have to give up some of our land as watersheds, as berms, we have to be compensated because we can no longer use the land.

Mr Hudak: What I thought you were getting at is in some European countries—I think in the States too—some farmers in environmental areas actually get compensation for their environmental stewardship, and I thought you might be going down that path. What do you think of that notion? If farmland in Niagara is bound by a minister's order to stay in agricultural production, should there be compensation for your help with making the greenbelt a success from an environmental point of view?

Mr Warner: I think so. Somewhere I read, and I don't know if it was in here, that if it is for our personal benefit, then we would look after it ourselves, but if it's

for the benefit of the public, then the public purse should pay for that, and the public purse is the government.

Ms Mous: One thing you have to realize is that if you turn our food-producing land into parks, we will no longer be able to produce food, and then you will be importing. Then you are going to run into a lot of problems because a lot of things that come across the border are using pesticides that we cannot use in our own country, but you will be consuming foods that are full of it.

One other thing I just wanted to say about income is, there's an incredible increase of off-farm workers. I have to work off the farm to support the farm. I would like to be just a farmer and I would like my kids to be farmers, but it's not going to happen.

The land severances—it used to be in a retirement. I have no retirement right now, my husband has no retirement, and that was how it was looked upon. Now, if we were financially viable, we could plan our own retirement; we're not at this point.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms Mous and Mr Warner, for your presentation. Everything has been recorded.

1630

THE ONTARIO GREENHOUSE ALLIANCE

The Chair: The next presenter will be the Ontario Greenhouse Alliance, Rej Picard and Antoine van der Knaap.

Mr Rej Picard: A Frenchman and a Dutchman. That's all you need to finish off your meetings, Mr Chairman.

The Chair: He says he's a francophone. We have instant translation here, by the way.

Mr Picard: On n'en a pas besoin, merci.

Thank you very much for having us here today. I am a flower grower. Toine is a vegetable grower. We are here representing the Ontario Greenhouse Alliance, which consists of all vegetable and flower growers in Ontario. It's been a long day, and in order not to repeat many of the points made by some of the previous speakers, I will only say that we concur in the presentations of:

Mayor Hodgson, in whose community many of our members grow;

Ms Zimmerman and Mr Troup, who made reference to the agricultural task force report, of which I was a member, and to the agricultural impact study, of which I was also a member, and I would ask that both those documents be part of the public record if they are not already, in terms of this meeting; and

Dr Irwin Smith, of whose organization I am also a member and have also served as president.

Just to summarize, we are particularly in agreement with the requests of previous speakers that appropriate subcommittees be established and no unilateral ministerial decisions be made. Farming should be defined by its processes. Greenhouse crops grow because of light and temperature. We call that farming. Dr Smith referred

to greenhouses as having recognized agricultural status under many provincial and federal statutes. Under no circumstances can we accept the change of status as a currently designated land use. We agree with the remainder of our agricultural community that the key to any policy changes is flexibility and diversity in the use of the agricultural land.

Mr Antoine van der Knaap: My name is Antoine van der Knaap. I'm from St David's Hydroponics, and I'm representing the pepper board in Leamington. I'm here to confirm what Rej just talked about. He's a much better speaker than I am.

Mr Hudak: Don't be shy.

Mr van der Knaap: Shy is a good thing most of the time.

Mr Picard: We've probably allowed lots of time for questions if there are any from the committee. We'd be pleased to answer any questions specifically to the greenhouse industry.

The Chair: Definitely. We have at least 15 minutes at the present time, and the first question would come from Ms Churley.

Ms Churley: I have a question around pesticide use, which I suppose is not relevant to the issue before us today, but it's been brought up a couple of times and it's an interest of mine: just a clarification of the difference in environmental rules here and in the US, for instance, and what level of pesticide use there is these days.

Mr Picard: They have access to a lot of things we don't have access to. One of the things that a group like Flowers Canada and OGVG—the Ontario Greenhouse Vegetable Growers—do is try to apply to the federal ministries for minor use registrations to allow us to use pesticides that we know are being used by our competitors in the United States and in other countries, and possibly being used in other agricultural industries even within Canada, but cannot be used for a specific greenhouse crop. There are a number of those, and it is a problem. We're trying to reduce pesticide use by having, as Dr Smith mentioned, recirculating systems in the greenhouses. Most of our pesticide use and fertilizer use is done through those irrigation systems, so that the only thing that's lost is the actual evaporation by the plant. Everything else goes back in, gets remonitored, recirculated and used again. It's as efficient a system as we can find.

Ms Churley: I have no further questions, simply because I think your position is similar to some of your colleagues today. I just want to take this opportunity to thank you for coming forward on such short notice.

Mr Picard: I will comment on you saying our position is the same as many of our colleagues. The agricultural impact study said we were presenting that document as one voice. That is the voice of greenhouses, of cattle, of poultry, of tender fruit, of grape—PALS was at the table. That's why I said it's important that that document become public record, because listed on the back of that document were all the participants. I think

it's important that people know who those participants were.

Ms Churley: You had a response?

Mr van der Knaap: Yes. I would like to add that especially in the vegetable greenhouses we use mainly biological pest control. That means we use maybe 1% insecticide. Certain flower growers in the peninsula are now going in that direction also. They started in the vegetables about 20 years ago, and we are highly successful. All the flower growers who are doing it at the moment are learning a lot, and they're getting there also. It's a very valuable point, I guess.

Ms Churley: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Mr Parsons and Mrs Van Bommel would like to ask questions.

Mr Parsons: We do beef and springer cattle, although with the current prices they are more pets than commodities around the place. I know the effect of urbanization on our operation, but I don't know much about yours. What effect does it have on your operations if houses are developed around you?

Mr Picard: Certainly, we have our original operation that we started in 1959 in the town of Grimsby, which right now sits as a nonconforming use within what has been designated as a residential area. I probably take two or three phone calls a week from residents on the other side of our greenhouse that a window is squeaking or there's a light on or they hear the boiler starting. I have to be honest with you: It is a nuisance. But we make do. We do everything possible to be good corporate citizens, if you will, within that area. If we had a choice, would we want to be there? No. I wish we were out in a normal agricultural area and able to operate in that environment. But unfortunately when you are there, and over a period of over 40 years they surround you with residential—it would not be my choice to move into that neighbourhood.

Mr Parsons: I would think that of all the types of agriculture, yours would be the best as a neighbour. I'm not surprised, but I find that interesting.

Mrs Van Bommel: Just two questions. One, I'd like to know how many acres altogether are under glass in this area.

Two, when you're dealing with the finished pepper plants, how do you handle the material when you're finished? It's not the same as flowers; you have vines and leaves and stuff when you start over again. I've seen these plants; they grow like trees. How do you handle that, where do you go with that and how do your neighbours respond to what you do with that material?

Mr van der Knaap: That question is specifically for me, I guess. During the season, all the leftover leaves and bell peppers go to our local farmer, who feeds them to the cows. He's really happy with it, because in the winter they always have fresh leaves to eat. At cleanout we transport the vines to our other location and compost them there. Plastic materials go to the dump at the moment. But what you see, especially in such a huge greenhouse area, are recycling types of businesses start-

ing up, shredding the plastic and recycling everything. That's where it's going very quickly.

Mrs Van Bommel: I'm just wondering about the acreage question.

Mr Picard: I was just getting that information for you. In Niagara we have about 265 acres of greenhouse and flower production, and in Ontario it's in excess of 700 acres of production. I would add that of that value of greenhouse production in Canada, I think about 60% of all the dollar farm gate value rests in Ontario, between Fort Erie, primarily Niagara, and Leamington as a secondary area. They are stronger in vegetable production, and we in Niagara are bigger in flower production.

The Chair: I will move to Mr Hudak.

Mr Hudak: Thank you both for the presentation, and congratulations. Mr Picard is also on that committee you've heard about from many presenters today. They've done an outstanding job in bringing together various commodity groups, which don't always see eye to eye on the issues, to bring forward one voice.

Mr Picard: It was interesting.

Mr Hudak: Actually, remarkable progress has been occurring here in Niagara.

This legislation now sort of leaps ahead. One of the challenges I'll bring up when we get into particular clauses in the bill is that significant power now comes to the Minister of Municipal Affairs's office in terms of granting exemptions, defining where urban boundaries may be, defining urban uses and such. It takes it away from the local municipality. What's your degree of confidence in the stewardship you've seen from the politicians here in Niagara, both at the region and locally, in remedying the balance between agriculture and development?

1640

Mr Picard: Well, we feel we're making progress. We took the agriculture task force report and presented it to all the municipalities individually. I was at a meeting on Tuesday where we presented it to the region's planning committee, where it was unanimously endorsed for presentation to the regional council of Niagara, and we believe the regional council of Niagara will be fully supportive in any assistance and support that we need in any provincial presentations etc. So we think it is definitely a regionally supported document now.

Mr Hudak: The other two points—I'm not sure how I'm doing on time there, Chair, but with respect to the question I brought up with Flowers Canada also, I am concerned that you may find greenhouses somehow defined out of agriculture, which would then prohibit any kind of growth here in the peninsula or any part of the greenbelt area. Perhaps you could comment on that.

Secondly, for the industry in general—and this is a very general question—what needs to be in place for the industry to be successful in a municipality in terms of municipal servicing, the type of land that you use, or are greenhouses pretty flexible in terms of, whatever land you want to place them on, they'll work out?

Mr Picard: That's a lot of questions, Tim.

Mr Hudak: I know. I'm a curious fellow.

Mr Picard: Certainly in terms of value, if you look at the impact in Niagara, the study said there was a \$1.8-billion industry in Niagara with spinoff of farm gate, and 42% of that was the greenhouse industry, which has grown considerably. I believe in the last report, in the early 1980s, it was 19%. Now it's 42%, which is significant, and it has the largest impact financially in agriculture in Niagara.

If we were to lose our land status, it might destroy the industry here. People have talked about, "Well, move south in the peninsula." There is a five-degree ambient temperature differential there, which in itself would mean very high energy cost increases, which is a big part of what we do. Access to the labour market might be a little more difficult without the infrastructure to support that; just having gas lines and hydro lines and road access. So if that plan is there and it's to be done in conjunction with the mid-peninsula corridor and it's a 25-year plan, I'm sure as an industry we can adapt and we can start thinking that way, but it can't be black and white. You can't say we're here one day and "You can," and the next day, "You can't any more." That would be disastrous.

We've proven to be a successful, self-supporting, good corporate citizen municipally, provincially and federally. We haven't gone out asking for a lot of hand-outs. We think we've done a good job of doing what we do, and it would be a shame to cut us off from that.

The Chair: Very good. Merci bien, Monsieur Picard. Thank you very much, Mr van der Knaap.

Mr Hudak: No Dutch?

The Chair: No, no Dutch. Thank you very much.

Mr Hudak: The French was very good.

CITY OF PORT COLBORNE

The Chair: As agreed previously, we have the mayor of Port Colborne here. I have to apologize, but I had to follow my agenda. Your Worship, we have 15 minutes available for you.

Mr Ron Bodner: Hopefully I won't take that much time. Thank you for your indulgence, and sorry to hold you up after a long afternoon. Certainly the city of Port Colborne is not, as it stands now, in this greenbelt legislation, but I think we are probably part of the solution to it.

Just before I get into my prepared speech, I feel like I'm a little part of the solution here, because as well as being a mayor, I also have a market that I sell tender fruit in, which I buy from Niagara-on-the-Lake. I sell greenhouse vegetables, I sell flowers, and heaven knows our family drinks enough wine. I think we could keep a small winery going.

We've certainly heard today that we have to save the farmer as well as the land, because if all we have is a park, the peaches I'm selling are going to be from Chile or California, and I certainly don't look forward to that. So I'd certainly like to stress that.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak to you today about the benefits of the mid-peninsula transportation corridor, newly termed the Niagara/GTA corridor, and its relationship to the proposed greenbelt legislation.

Port Colborne is a vibrant municipality that has worked extremely hard to attract new industry and tourism. We are internationally represented by companies such as Jungbunzlauer and Smucker's. We also boast a number of local, long-standing industries which provide employment to many residents of Niagara. Our festivals are recognized as being some of the best in Ontario, and Port Colborne is rapidly becoming a choice tourist destination. I have also met with the mayors of Welland, Pelham, Wainfleet and West Lincoln, who have offered their full support to this corridor, and I speak today on their behalf as well on this corridor.

In order to continue the growth, it is believed that the province needs to support the regional municipality of Niagara's initiative to construct a new east-west provincial highway south of the Niagara Escarpment, located between the cities of Welland and Port Colborne.

In 1998, the provincial government completed the Niagara Frontier Gateway Study to address long-term highway improvements in Niagara. These highway improvements, and in particular the mid-peninsula corridor, are critically important, given that: the Queen Elizabeth Way has been identified as a primary trade corridor with the US and Mexico as a result of NAFTA; the United States government is moving to meet its transportation challenges by approving a \$218-billion, five-year Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century to fund interstate highway improvements which parallel highway expenditures on the Canadian side and to facilitate free trade; the twinning of the Peace Bridge between Fort Erie and Buffalo will result in an increase in vehicular traffic; the Ministry of Transportation reports that highway travel demands will increase significantly in the future and that the existing Queen Elizabeth Way from Hamilton to Niagara Falls will become deficient as early as 2011; the corridor will address a range of growth, economic, community development, tourism and transportation issues to the city of Port Colborne, including the potential positive impacts of diverting truck traffic travelling between western Ontario and New York state off the Queen Elizabeth Way.

Provincially approved local and regional initiatives have for some time included the mid-peninsula corridor as a strategic objective for a number of reasons, including conserving tender fruit and grape land resources in proximity to the Queen Elizabeth Way, supporting community growth and development south of the Niagara Escarpment, and providing transportation systems which are environmentally sensitive and energy-efficient. I think here we're talking about a corridor, not necessarily a highway, which could include rail also in this corridor.

Recently, the planning services committee of the region of Niagara prepared a report with respect to this

matter. I would like to quote a portion of that report. I also sit on planning at the region.

"Transportation improvements are viewed as being key to the redirection of growth in Niagara. In particular, success of the 'Grow South' approach may well depend on such transportation initiatives as the extension of Highway 406 and the development of a mid-peninsula corridor. The regional policy plan has been approved by the province and growth in the southern part of the region is an integral part of that plan. This could assist in focusing economic development in those areas of the region that are not affected by the proposed greenbelt legislation and zoning order. The mid-peninsula corridor is an alternative to widening the Queen Elizabeth Way and is important in that context as well as the redirection context. Emphasis should be given to this project."

That's the end of the quote.

The region of Niagara is a valuable asset to the province with its agriculture and tourism draws. It is the firm belief of the municipalities within the region of Niagara that the construction of the mid-peninsula corridor will serve a dual purpose. The first will be to ensure that our tender fruit and grape land resources are conserved, allowing for those industries to grow. The second benefit involves our viability on the world markets. Port Colborne has the geographic luxury of being in very close proximity to the Great Lakes shipping lanes as well as rail access. The addition of a mid-peninsula corridor would serve to enhance our competitiveness in attracting business to our area, which in turn can be of benefit to the residents of the regional municipality of Niagara, and particularly the citizens of Welland, Port Colborne, Pelham, Wainfleet and West Lincoln.

I thank you for your time and urge the province to take whatever steps necessary to study the benefits of the mid-peninsula transportation corridor with an emphasis on its importance to growth, the economy, community development, tourism and transportation issues and its impact on the proposed greenbelt area.

1650

The Chair: Thank you, Your Worship. Would there be any questions? We could have about two minutes each.

Mr Parsons: Just a quick question. Could we get a copy of that? That was a well-thought-out presentation.

Mr Bodner: Yes. I'm going to e-mail it. I have a card and the e-mail. I've brought one, but I've marked it up quite a bit.

The Chair: It's also going to be in Hansard.

Mr Craitor: Thank you, Mr Mayor. It's a pleasure to have you here.

Just for the record, I have supported the mid-peninsula corridor. I know Tim, in his unique way, brings it up regularly at Queen's Park. I supported it when I was on city council and I do believe in it. I think it's a great opportunity. Your comments are well put. Certainly there's a process, it has been explained to me, that we're obligated to go through. I'd like it to go quicker. Every opportunity I have, I regularly mention it to the Minister

of Transportation. As you said, it is a real golden opportunity. Although it may, on the surface, appear it doesn't relate to what we're talking about, it does in fact. So I really appreciate you taking the time to come up here and share it with the committee.

Mr Bodner: Thank you. I think it's a piece of the puzzle. It's not directly there, but it's one piece of the puzzle.

Mr Hudak: Thank you, Mayor Bodner, first for your patience. Thanks to the members of the committee. I'm glad it worked out and we were able to bring this important point forward.

You're absolutely right. The mid-peninsula corridor is actually an environmental solution that helps support the greenbelt. I think if we want the greenbelt to be successful, we need to move ahead with the corridor as soon as possible, just like you said in your presentation.

Kim is right: I've brought this up in question period a few times, and I think the minister is probably tired of hearing it from me, but I think your presentation on behalf of the city of Port Colborne and the other municipalities that you mentioned helps to demonstrate why this project should become more of a priority than it currently is.

I appreciate your points too, which I think help illustrate that Niagara has taken a very region-wide approach to the greenbelt issue, where a mayor from a community that is not impacted by this legislation still wants to see the fruit land protected and is an avid participant.

Let me ask you another question. You talked about the mid-pen corridor. Do you want to make any presentations on Highway 406 as well and how that can support development in southern Niagara?

Mr Bodner: If you're trying to take the pressure off those tender fruit lands—and I agree; I think that's the goal here. If we are going to force development or suggest that development go south, then we do need the transportation corridors to handle that development and make it more attractive for development to move that way. The 406 into Port Colborne would fit in nicely with the mid-pen.

The Chair: Ms Churley?

Ms Churley: I have no questions. Thank you very much for coming and presenting today.

Mr Bodner: Thank you for your indulgence.

The Chair: Thank you very much. Just for the record, the mayor is Mayor Ron Bodner.

Once again, thank you very much, everyone. If I could have a motion—

Clerk of the Committee: We don't need a motion.

The Chair: If I could see Mrs Van Bommel, Ms Churley and Mr Hudak for a minute.

Due to the number of witnesses who want to appear, we'll have to add some days. What we're looking at for the present time is the 31st and the 2nd in Toronto.

Clerk of the Committee: The 31st was already included as a public hearing day.

The Chair: But when the motion was brought in the House we only said the 14th, the 17th and the 21st.

Clerk of the Committee: But the subcommittee agreed to use the 31st if needed, and it was included.

The Chair: Now we have to add the 2nd and clause-by-clause on the 7th.

Ms Churley: Can I get clarification? I'm not quite sure what you're saying. A motion went through the House, the subcommittee met and we have days set aside. Are you suggesting that because of all the extra requests we actually ask for more days to be added on for hearings?

The Chair: That's why I want to bring it up right now. Otherwise, I'll have to call a subcommittee meeting on Monday morning. If we agree here, we don't have to call the subcommittee meeting on Monday morning.

Clerk of the Committee: I think the issue is that the deadline hasn't passed yet, so people still have a chance to call in and there aren't enough slots to accommodate—

Ms Churley: But I understand the process is such that when you set aside a certain number of days for hearings and they get filled up, then that's it.

Clerk of the Committee: That's the committee's decision, though.

Ms Churley: I know it's the committee's decision, but that's the normal process.

Clerk of the Committee: In that case, I could probably send you the list so that you can select.

The Chair: Yes. Either she sends you the list and we select, or we add the two extra days: the 31st and—

Clerk of the Committee: I wouldn't include the 31st, because that has already been included as a public hearing day.

The Chair: Right; the 2nd, then.

Ms Churley: I'd be interested in what the other subcommittee members have to say about extending the deadline. Frankly, if we're going to have that discussion, I'd prefer to try to do it on Monday. I don't have my up-to-date calendar in front of me and I know I've got a very busy schedule coming up. Remember what we went through at the subcommittee meeting just trying to find these days. I expect we would all have to look at our calendars.

The Chair: Can we meet at 10:15 on Monday, then?

Clerk of the Committee: That's just a subcommittee meeting?

Ms Churley: Just the subcommittee to discuss whether or not we should extend the hearings. Then would we have to go back to the House for an extension?

Clerk of the Committee: Actually, we're not time-allocated, so we can meet on our regularly scheduled meeting days, which are Monday and Wednesday. So we just keep pushing back when we actually do clause-by-clause.

Ms Churley: Perhaps we'd better have the subcommittee meeting, then. I sound like I'm speaking for the government here, but I'm not. There were some constraints—

Mr Craitor: You're official now.

Ms Churley: I'm official. We'd better meet, because we were trying to accommodate the government in this

case in terms of getting this back to the House, frankly. I don't really care. I think if people want to be heard, they should be heard, but, to be kind here, that was part of the issue.

Mrs Van Bommel: I was just going to suggest that maybe we could reduce each presentation by even five minutes, so we give them all 15 and we could add a few in there that way.

The Chair: That's not enough. We will already have to reduce it down to 15 minutes instead of 20.

Mr Hudak: Mr Ouellette is the usual member of the subcommittee, so I can't pretend to speak for him, but as you know, I have some serious concerns about the legislation and other activities that I think should support the legislation that are not in place. I, for one, think it's

important for us to hear those other deputations and would be very pleased to attend future meetings in order to do so. So if you want to get together again for subcommittee come Monday, we'll make every effort, but I do believe, on principle, that we should be open to the list of deputations and do additional hearings.

The Chair: Can each subcommittee rep call Tonia on Monday morning to let her know?

Ms Churley: Can I just say that I can make myself available for the subcommittee meeting and, for the record, would be supportive of continuing on with the hearings to hear from everybody. It's a matter of scheduling, which I think is going to be very difficult.

The Chair: OK. The hearing is adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 1659.

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Mr Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln PC)

Mrs Maria Van Bommel (Lambton-Kent-Middlesex L)

Also taking part / Autres participants et participantes

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre / Niagara-Centre ND)

Clerk / Greffière

Ms Tonia Grannum

Staff / Personnel

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