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Toronto and Region
Conservation
for The Living City

May 28, 2014

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At Authority Meeting #4/14, of Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA), held on May 23, 2014, Resolution #A85/14 in regard to Expanding Ontario's Greenbelt was approved as follows:

THAT Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) offer its support and assistance to the City of Toronto and to all municipalities within TRCA's watersheds who are considering recognizing the Greenbelt Plan's River Valley Connections in their official plans or adding public lands into the Urban River Valley designation of the Greenbelt Plan;

THAT TRCA continue its program of land acquisition in the valleys to complete the missing links and achieve a fully connected system of publicly owned urban valley lands;

THAT this report be circulated to all municipalities within TRCA watersheds;

AND FURTHER THAT staff report back on the pilot projects with municipal partners in studying the impact of the expansion of the Greenbelt.

Enclosed for your information and any action deemed necessary is the report as presented to the Executive Committee on May 2, 2014. If you have any questions or require additional information, please contact the undersigned at 416-661-6600 extension 5264 (kstranks@trca.on.ca) or David Burnett at extension 5361 (dburnett@trca.on.ca)

Sincerely

Kathy Stranks
Manager, Corporate Secretariat
CEO's Office

cc. David Burnett, Manager, Provincial and Regional Policy, TRCA

/Encl.



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Item EX7.5

TO: Chair and Members of the Executive Committee
Meeting #3/14, May 2, 2014

FROM: Carolyn Woodland, Director, Planning and Development

RE: **EXPANDING ONTARIO'S GREENBELT**

KEY ISSUE

Confirming a request from Toronto Environmental Alliance to support and assist the City of Toronto in Growing the Greenbelt in urban river valleys.

RECOMMENDATION

THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE RECOMMENDS THAT Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) offer its support and assistance to the City of Toronto and to all municipalities within TRCA's watersheds who are considering recognizing the Greenbelt Plan's River Valley Connections in their official plans or adding public lands into the Urban River Valley designation of the Greenbelt Plan;

THAT TRCA continue its program of land acquisition in the valleys to complete the missing links and achieve a fully connected system of publicly owned urban valley lands;

AND FURTHER THAT this report be circulated to all municipalities within TRCA watersheds.

BACKGROUND

At Executive Committee Meeting #12/13, held on February 7, 2014, Resolution #B176/13 was approved, in part, as follows:

...AND FURTHER THAT Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) staff report back on the feasibility of TRCA supporting the addition of lands in the Humber, Don and Etobicoke Creek valley systems into Ontario's Greenbelt under the Urban River Valley designation.

Greenbelt Act and Plan

The Province of Ontario enacted the Greenbelt Act and Greenbelt Plan in February, 2005 which stated its vision of the Greenbelt as a broadband of permanently protected land which:

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

TRCA-owned and operated conservation areas, such as Kortright Centre for Conservation were included in the initial draft Greenbelt Plan (GBP), which was subsequently amended in the final Plan, at TRCA's request, to also include the Boyd complex south of Rutherford Road, among other lands added.

River Valley Connections

Mapping included in the GBP (Schedule 1, Attachment 1) shows dashed lines as "River Valley Connections" that link the Greenbelt lands in the northern parts of TRCA's watersheds via the major river valleys such as the Humber and Don rivers and Etobicoke Creek, through the urban areas to connect with the Lake Ontario shoreline. Additionally, Section 3.2.5 of the GBP, titled External Connections, includes policies to promote best practices in these lands, including the continuation of stewardship, remediation or park and trail initiatives, as well as seeking opportunities when considering adjacent (re)development, to strive to improve and restore fish habitat and vegetation protection zones (i.e. buffers), as well as to minimize and mitigate for the quantity and quality of stormwater runoff.

Growing the Greenbelt

In 2008 the Province introduced six new criteria for Growing the Greenbelt. The key criteria included that the request must come from a municipality through an approved council resolution; there must be appropriate public consultation; there must be a demonstrated functional relationship to at least one of the Greenbelt systems (natural heritage, water resources or agricultural); and that the expansion will not undermine other provincial interests, such as the Growth Plan or Metrolinx transportation plans.

Prior TRCA Involvement to Grow the Greenbelt

In responding to the Growing the Greenbelt criteria, Authority Resolution #A75/08 was approved to support of growing the Greenbelt and municipal efforts to identify candidate areas for inclusion. In 2010 and 2011 TRCA staff worked with staff from the City of Toronto, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH) as well as staff from Toronto Environmental Alliance (TEA) to assess river valleylands in the Don and Humber valleys, develop criteria for including lands, prepare mapping and understand the policy implications of adding these lands into the Greenbelt.

In January of 2013, TRCA provided comments to the Province on a proposed amendment to the GBP, which the Province hoped would make it easier for municipalities to add new lands to the Greenbelt. TRCA supported the amendment from an education and awareness perspective. However, the proposed amendment offered little additional policy benefits, did not take a systems approach by excluding private lands, came with no funding for stewardship, management or restoration plans, and did not recognize TRCA's permitting and regulatory role for development in or adjacent to these valleylands.

Currently in 2014, TRCA staff is continuing to meet with staff from the City of Toronto, MMAH and TEA to discuss the new Urban River Valley (URV) designation, as well as an alternative approach to recognize the "river valley connections" and associated Greenbelt Plan policies through an amendment to the City's official plan. Additionally, TRCA staff has met with staff from the City of Mississauga, who are studying the possibility of Growing the Greenbelt along the Credit River and the Etobicoke Creek. Further, staff from the City of Brampton has recently indicated that they also are studying the URV designation, especially for Claireville Conservation Area.

Greenbelt Plan Amendment #1 - URV

This amendment to the GBP by the Province in 2013 added in to the Greenbelt a parcel of provincially-owned land in Oakville. More importantly, this amendment introduced the Urban River Valley designation as a new land use designation in the GBP. The amendment specifies that only publicly owned lands may be added to the URV. New URV goals are included to protect natural heritage and hydrologic features and functions along the URV; provide linkages between the Greenbelt and the Great Lakes; and to provide a range of natural settings on publicly owned lands for recreational, cultural and tourism uses including parkland, open space and trails. A new Section 6 has been added to the GBP for the URV policies which state generally that: the applicable municipal official plan policies apply; new infrastructure approved under an environmental assessment or similar process is permitted; and that the existing GBP policies related to the Protected Countryside designation do not apply in the URV, except for the policies related to external connections (s. 3.2.5) and parkland, open space and trails (s. 3.3).

Current Regulatory Regime for Valley and Stream Corridors

Currently, within the City of Toronto there are four layers of management and protection policies that adequately govern the uses permitted in or adjacent to valley and stream corridors. These are:

Conservation Authorities Act

Ontario Regulation 166/06, As Amended, is TRCA's Section 28 Regulation under the *Conservation Authorities Act*, which requires a permit for development, site alteration or interference in regulated areas such as watercourses, valleylands, wetlands, shorelines or hazardous lands and their associated allowances.

Environmental Assessment Act (EAA)

Crossings of valleylands by infrastructure (roads, transit, water and wastewater pipes, utilities, etc.) are undertakings that must be approved under the EAA to ensure that impacts to the natural environment are minimized. Approvals are granted by the Province and TRCA is a commenting agency during the study process to ensure that a Section 28 permit can be granted at the appropriate stage.

Planning Act

Planning Act tools such as municipal official plans and zoning by-laws are required to be consistent with the Provincial Policy Statement requirements for the protection of natural heritage systems, water resources and the protection of public health and safety from natural hazards. The City of Toronto has a comprehensive suite of official plan policies for Greenspace, Natural Environment and Parks and Open Space System policies to protect and enhance environmental features, including valleylands, while allowing for essential infrastructure, recreational and cultural facilities.

Municipal Act

Under the authority of the *Municipal Act*, the City of Toronto has enacted the "Ravine and Natural Feature Protection By-law". This by-law works in conjunction with O. Reg. 166/06, As Amended, to provide further protection to ravines, trees, treed portions of tablelands adjacent to ravines/valleys and other natural areas and requires a permit from the City prior to any filling, dumping or removal of trees in the regulated area.

The new URV designation and policies of the Greenbelt Plan adds no new regulatory layers to these existing tools, but rather relies on them to achieve the vision and goals of the Greenbelt Plan for the protection and management of the urban river valleys. In general, most municipalities outside of the City of Toronto do not have their own ravine protection by-law equivalent, however, the other three regulatory tools identified above continue to apply in those other municipalities.

RATIONALE

TRCA Interest in URV Designation or Similar River Valley Connections Approach

TRCA has multiple interests in growing the Greenbelt in the urban river valleys or similarly, having the river valley connections identified in municipal official plans, that aligns well with its mandate and activities such as:

- promoting to City residents the benefits of the river valleys for recreational opportunities and the role residents can play in the stewardship and restoration of valleylands;
- continuation of land acquisition in the valleys to complete the missing links and achieve a fully connected system of publicly owned valleylands;
- implementation of TRCA's Strategic Plan pillars of: Healthy Rivers and Shorelines, Greenspace and Biodiversity; as well as Leadership Strategy #3 to Rethink greenspace and maximize its value; and
- working with City staff to recognize the role of the valleys as "green infrastructure" and to minimize and remediate impacts from infrastructure works and flood and erosion events.

Additionally, TRCA also needs to assess potential concerns such as:

- understanding whether URV designation would have any impacts to the land ownership and management agreements with the City and if there would be any restrictions on the future use of these lands for activities such as trails or remediation works. These concerns would likely be nonexistent with the river valley connections approach;
- exploring whether the URV designation would have any implications for TRCA's current regulatory regime or roles as a commenting agency under the *Planning Act* or *Environmental Assessment Act*; and
- ensuring that TRCA's ability to engage in environmentally appropriate revenue generating activities at its conservation parks, in order to fund and support its conservation, management and restoration efforts, would not be compromised.

Budget Implications

The prior assistance and support that TRCA planning and GIS staff have provided to the City of Toronto has been funded from within the existing staff complement and associated budget, as provided through the municipal levy. Staff anticipate no change in this regard.

SUMMARY

TRCA staff is continuing to work with our municipal partners to realize the benefits of Growing the Greenbelt through URV designation or an alternate approach to recognize the river valley connections in official plan documents. TRCA planning staff currently believe that neither approach imposes any serious barriers with respect to the potential concerns identified above. Staff hold the opinion and recommend that the TEA letter (Attachment 2) requesting TRCA support and assistance to the City of Toronto should be supported, and indeed, be extended to all municipalities within its watersheds who are seeking to Grow the Greenbelt or recognize the river valley connections in their official plans.

Report prepared by: David Burnett, extension 5361

Emails: @trca.on.ca

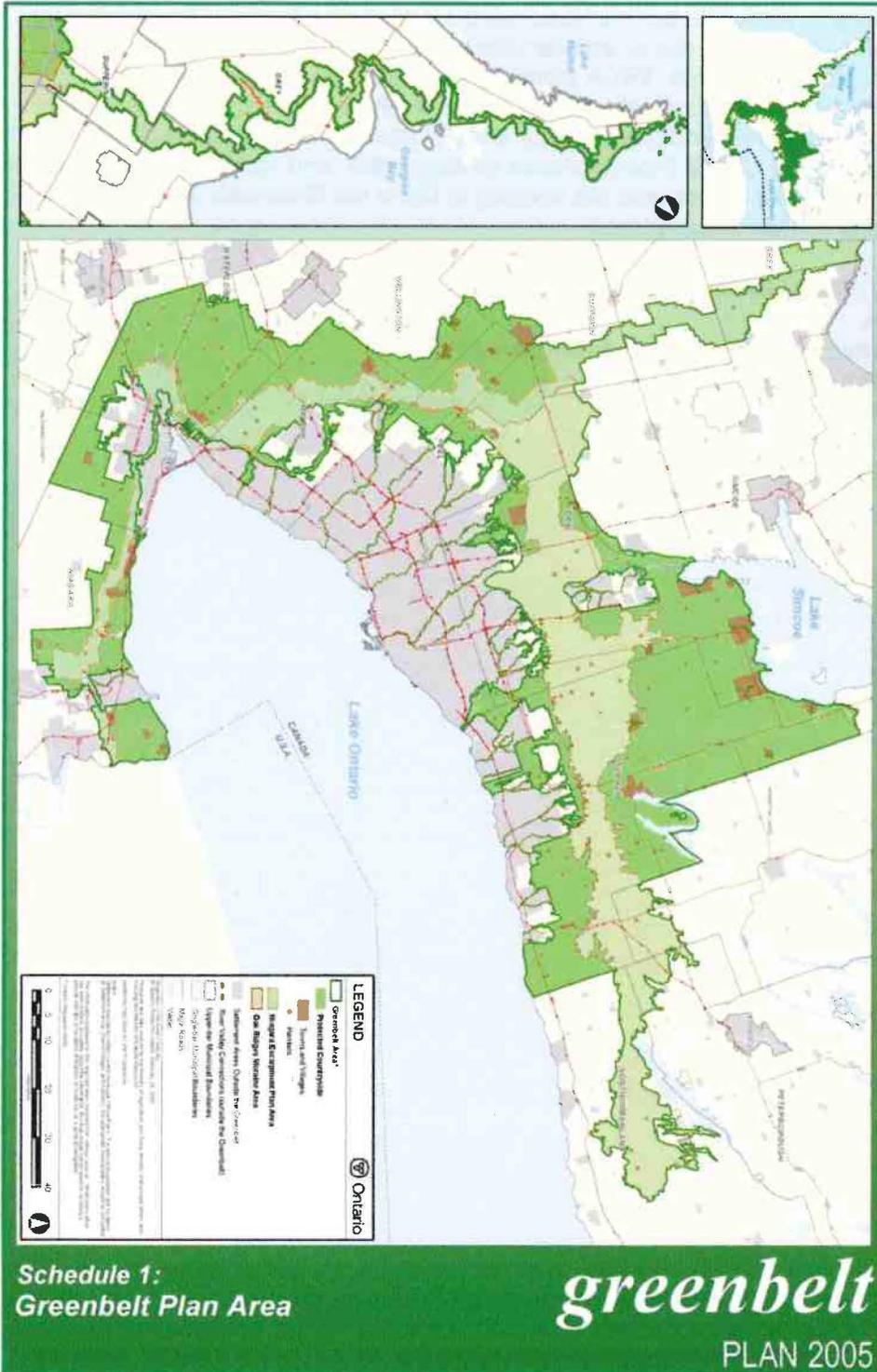
For Information contact: David Burnett, extension 5361

Emails: dburnett@trca.on.ca

Date: April 10, 2014

Attachments: 2

Attachment 1





January 29, 2014

Chair O'Connor and Members of the Authority
Toronto and Region Conservation Authority
5 Shoreham Drive
Downsview, Ontario M3N 1S4

Dear Chair O'Connor and Members of the Authority,

Re: Urban River Valley Designation for the Don, Humber and Etobicoke Creek Valley Systems

On behalf of the Toronto Environmental Alliance (TEA), we respectfully request the TRCA Board of Directors to pass a motion in support of the City of Toronto requesting the Province of Ontario to designate the public lands in the Don, Humber and Etobicoke Creek River Valley systems as part of Ontario's Greenbelt.

We make this request as there is a natural fit between the underlying philosophy and aims of *Building the Living City*, the TRCA's 10 year strategic plan, and the Provincial Greenbelt Plan. In our view, there are two key reasons to move forward with this request. First, The Greenbelt Plan can become a useful tool to assist the TRCA in meeting critical restoration, regeneration and stewardship goals across the GTA region, as outlined in *Building the Living City*. Second, the Greenbelt Urban River Valley designation will help implement key objectives in Leadership Strategy #3: "Rethink greenspace to maximize its value" outlined in *Building The Living City*.

As such, we ask the TRCA Board to adopt the following recommendation:

Whereas the TRCA supports the addition of publicly owned lands in the Humber, Don And Etobicoke Creek valley systems into Ontario's Greenbelt under the Urban River Valley (URV) designation;

Whereas The City of Toronto passed a motion in 2010 to consider adding lands to the Greenbelt which stated, in part, "City Council support, in principle, the addition of public lands in the Don and Humber River Valleys to Ontario's Greenbelt to ensure these valuable lands are preserved and protected..."

Therefore be it resolved that the TRCA offer its support and logistical assistance, where necessary, to City of Toronto staff in pursuing the Urban River Valley designation for public lands in the Don and Humber Rivers and the Etobicoke Creek.

Below we have provided background information as well as rationale for moving forward with the URV designation. In addition, we are happy to provide any additional information you may require, or make a presentation to the Executive.

Sincerely,

Franz Hartmann, Executive Director

cc. Brian Denney

Background

In February 2010 Toronto City Council passed motions that support, in principle, the addition of public lands in the Don and Humber River valleys to Ontario's Greenbelt. The motions also asked for City staff to work with the TRCA to prepare a report setting out how to proceed with this direction. A city staff report, dated April 13, 2011 essentially noted that there was no existing mechanism for Toronto to add these lands to the Greenbelt.

In January 2013, the Province amended the Greenbelt Plan through regulation and put in place a mechanism called the Urban River Valley (URV) designation that allows publicly owned urban river valleys to be added to the Greenbelt by way of municipal request.

In early 2014, the City of Mississauga's Environmental Advisory Committee passed a motion that the city add public lands to the Greenbelt on the west side of Etobicoke Creek under the URV designation.

The Greenbelt Act mandates a review of the Greenbelt Plan by 2015. This Review will create an opportunity for discussions about how the Greenbelt Plan can be further developed to help improve lands that are part of the Greenbelt. In particular, the Review creates the opportunity to introduce new approaches to protecting natural spaces that are unique to urban river valleys and the surrounding urban areas.

A New Tool for Building the Living City: the Greenbelt Plan

Before addressing why URV designation for TRCA lands in Toronto will be beneficial to *Building the Living City*, TRCA's Strategic Plan, it is important to note that there is a natural fit between the underlying philosophy and aims of *Building the Living City* and the Greenbelt Plan. This natural fit is found in the vision, approach and goals and objectives of *Building the Living City* and the *Greenbelt Plan*. See the chart below which illustrates consistency between both plans.

	Building the Living City	Greenbelt Plan
Vision	<p>"Pillar 1: Healthy Rivers and Shorelines Water is used thoughtfully and efficiently, and the water in our rivers, streams and waterfront is swimmable, fishable and easily treatable for drinking, even in the most highly populated areas.</p> <p>Pillar 2: Greenspace and Biodiversity. A robust resilient and equitably distributed system of green infrastructure provides ecological services to all residents of The Living City. Large and interconnected greenspaces offer a wide range of active and passive recreational opportunities, while safeguarding their natural environmental functions and providing suitable habitats for plant and animal species." (p. 6)</p>	<p>"1.2.1 Vision The Greenbelt is a broad band of permanently protected land which: -Protects against the loss and fragmentation of the agricultural land base and supports agriculture as the predominant land use; -Gives permanent protection to the natural heritage and water resource systems that sustain ecological and human health and that form the environmental framework around which major urbanization in south-central Ontario will be organized; and -Provides for a diverse range of economic and social activities associated with rural communities, agriculture, tourism, recreation and resource uses." (1.2.1)</p>

<p>Approach</p>	<p>“For almost 60 years, TRCA has managed its mandate on a watershed by watershed basis....Managing on a watershed basis helps ensure the ecological integrity of the fresh water processing system, while focusing environmental protection and restoration measures on a local level. Through the watershed-based approach, residents can build deeper understanding of their impact on their local environment.” (p. 11).</p>	<p>“The [natural] system is supported by a multitude of natural and hydrologic features and functions found within the Golden Horseshoe but outside of the NEP and the ORMCP. In particular, the numerous watersheds, subwatersheds and groundwater resources, including the network of tributaries that support the major river systems identified in this Plan, are critical to the long-term health and sustainability of water resources and biodiversity and overall ecological integrity. The analysis and management of the Greenbelt’s water resources must therefore be integrated with the management of water resources outside the Greenbelt. Municipal official plans and related resource management efforts by conservation authorities and others shall continue to assess and plan for these natural and hydrologic features in a comprehensive and integrated manner, which builds upon and supports the natural systems identified within the Greenbelt.” (3.2.1.3)</p>
<p>Goals and Objectives</p>	<p>“Leadership Strategy #3: Rethink greenspace to maximize its value”</p> <p>Objectives:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A network of greenspace and green infrastructure that weaves through every community to connect a healthy and resilient landscape. 2. More people engaging with nature more often. 3. Improved protection of Toronto region’s natural systems.” (p. 23) 	<p>“1.2.3 Urban River Valley Goals</p> <p>To integrate the Greenbelt into urban areas which were not in the Greenbelt at the time it was approved in 2005, by promoting the following matters within the Urban River Valley designation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Protection of natural and open space lands along river valleys in urban areas which will assist in connecting the rest of the Greenbelt Area to the Great Lakes and other inland lakes; - Protection of natural heritage and hydrologic features and functions along urban river valleys; - Provision of a gateway to the rural landscape of the Greenbelt; and - Provision of a range of natural settings on publicly owned lands for recreational, cultural and tourism uses including parkland, open space land and trails.” (Greenbelt Plan 1.2.3, January 10, 2013)

Rationale for URV Expansion

There are two key reasons for why the TRCA should support growing the Greenbelt on to public lands in Etobicoke Creek and the Humber River and Don River Valleys.

1. The Greenbelt Plan can become a useful tool to assist the TRCA in meeting critical restoration and stewardship actions across the region, as outlined in *Building the Living City*.

The introduction of *Building the Living City* states the TRCA's "paramount commitment to safeguarding and enhancing the health and well-being of the residents of the Toronto region through the protection and restoration of the natural environment and the fundamental ecological services our environment provides." (emphasis added, p. 4) Further in the plan, various protection and restoration actions are outlined.

The Greenbelt Plan has the potential to help the TRCA in meeting its protection, restoration and stewardship commitments at a time of tight provincial resources.

Think back to 2005 when the public support for local food was very limited. Today, large grocery store chains promote local food and farmers' markets exist across the GTA selling local food. One key reason for this incredible change is the Greenbelt Plan and the resources behind it. They became powerful tools that helped local food advocates convey to Ontarians the importance of local food and preserving agricultural lands in and surrounding the Greenbelt.

Similarly, the Greenbelt Plan and the resources behind it could be used to help meet critical restoration and stewardship actions, as set out in *Building the Living City*. For example, finding the resources for the restoration of urban river valley systems is an ongoing challenge. Consider how an association with the Greenbelt could help leverage resources and public support for restoration actions.

In 2015, the 10-year review of Greenbelt Plan will occur. The review process will provide an important opportunity to discuss and advocate for changes that better assist stakeholders whose lands and livelihoods are tied to the Greenbelt. Of course, stakeholders are much more likely to succeed in getting changes that benefit them if they have lands that are part of the Greenbelt.

2. A Greenbelt designation will help implement key objectives in Leadership Strategy #3 "Rethink greenspace to maximize its value," outlined in *Building the Living City*.

As noted above, Leadership Strategy 3 "Rethink greenspace to maximize its value" outlines the following three objectives:

1. A network of greenspace and green infrastructure that weaves through every community to connect a healthy and resilient landscape.
2. More people engaging with nature more often.
3. Improved protection of Toronto region's natural systems. (page 23)

By growing the Greenbelt into Etobicoke Creek and the Humber and Don River Valley systems, we begin the process of creating actual linkages between the public lands that make up the Humber and Don

Rivers and Etobicoke Creek watersheds. Put differently, it begins linking the watershed through one piece of legislation (the Greenbelt Plan) and helps the public in understanding that these river valley systems are part of a large watershed. Moreover, the high public regard for the Greenbelt could also translate into more people engaging and enjoying the river valley systems. Finally, the Greenbelt Plan will add another layer of protection to Toronto's natural systems by bringing the urban river valley lands under provincial protection.

Conclusion

There is a natural fit between the vision, approaches and goals and objectives of the TRCA's Strategic Plan, *Building the Living City*, and the Greenbelt Plan. The Greenbelt Plan offers a new tool that would allow the TRCA to engage in critical restoration and stewardship actions across the region, as outlined in *Building the Living City*. As well, Greenbelt designation of public lands in Etobicoke Creek and the Humber and Don River Valley systems will help meet key objectives in *Building the Living City*.

Finally, it is important to note that designating any land owned by the TRCA as part of the Greenbelt has no impact on the ownership of the designated land nor on the relationship between the City of Toronto and TRCA in the management of these lands.

