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MPP Tom Rakocevic
Chair, Public Accounts Committee Office of the Clerk

Legislative Assembly of Ontario
104-111 Wellesley Street West
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August 10, 2023

RE: Special Report on Changes to the Greenbelt

Chair Rakocevic,

I am writing today in my capacity as the Finance & Treasury Board Critic for Ontario's Official Opposition to request that the ***Special Report on Changes to the Greenbelt*** be considered a priority document to be reviewed by the Public Accounts Committee.

As you are aware, the Auditor found that "Provincial government actions in 2022 to open parts of the Greenbelt for development failed to consider environmental, agricultural and financial risks and impacts, proceeded with little input from experts or affected parties, and favoured certain developers/landowners".

Specifically, the Auditor noted that the owners of the 15 sites removed from Greenbelt could ultimately see more than an \$8.3 billion increase to the value of their properties.

There is some precedent to prioritize reports, including Special Reports: **Ornge Air Ambulance and Related Services (2012)** and **Oakville Power Plant Cancellation Costs (2013)**.

Key Findings:

- The government's target to increase housing did not require removing land from the Greenbelt.
- Political staff had substantial control over the entire Greenbelt amendment exercise, with the Minister of Housing's Chief of Staff directing the selection process, altered the criteria for selection, and imposed a 3-week timeline.
- Restrictions on the Housing Ministry's non-political staff team precluded an assessment of the cost to add needed infrastructure to each of the land sites proposed for removal, how the costs would be apportioned between the public and private sectors, or whether the affected municipalities would even all those lands to be developed if the removals proceeded.
- Of the 15 land sites ultimately approved for removal in December 2022, 14 were brought into the exercise by the Housing Minister's Chief of Staff
- About 67% (4,900) of the approximately 7,400 acres ultimately removed from the Greenbelt are on 2 land sites for which information was given by 2 developers to the Chief of Staff in September 2022 at an industry function they all attended.
- Greenbelt removals were approved without full consideration of environmental and agricultural risks. In addition, the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs indicated that about 83% of

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the area removed is classified as prime agricultural land, having the highest quality and capability for agriculture.

Finally, the Auditor states, “the exercise to change the Greenbelt boundaries in Fall 2022 cannot be described as a standard or defensible process”.

For these reasons, and so many more, I believe it is in the best interest of Ontarians for us to review the report in its entirety, invite those involved to share their experiences and to make recommendations to improve and prevent such an abuse of power to re-occur.

The people we serve deserve honest answers, so that trust can be restored.

Kind regards,



Catherine Fife
Finance & Treasury Board Critic
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