



Greenbelt Coalition of Canada's Capital Region
Coalition de la ceinture de verdure de la Région de la capitale du
Canada

WHO IS PROTECTING THE GREENBELT?

City and Developer rushing to destroy Greenbelt forest and wetland –
NCC refuses to stop it!

Ottawa, 3 October 2010 – For Immediate Release

On Monday morning the City's Planning and Environment Committee is set to approve a site plan for the construction by Shenkman Corporation of an exposition hall facility on 33 acres of environmentally sensitive land in the Greenbelt. The site is located between the Airport Parkway and Uplands Drive, on land leased to the Airport Authority. This would set a precedent by allowing development in a Greenbelt wetland area, contrary to both federal and provincial wetland policies.

The City is contributing \$8.5 million of taxpayers' money to the project, and recently approved another \$700,000 to help with immediate clear cutting, drainage and preparation of the site so that foundations can be poured before the frost hits.

“This is yet another example of death by a thousand cuts that the city's treasured Greenbelt is suffering,” says Sol Shuster, Chair of the Greenbelt Coalition, which represents fourteen environmental organizations in the city. “We are all for an exposition hall but this is a shameful use of public money when there are many other possible locations for this project that do not require destroying Greenbelt lands.”

Who is protecting the Greenbelt?

“Who is protecting the Greenbelt? Clearly, it's not the National Capital Commission,” says Nicole Desroches, Vice-chair of the Coalition. “The public relies on the NCC to take care of the Greenbelt and protect its important ecosystems for us. If the NCC can't protect the Greenbelt, then who can? The federal government needs to support them so they can do their job properly.” On October 1, the NCC sent a letter to the City acquiescing to the project while providing a number of suggestions as to how the site plan could be improved.

What is the City Doing?

On June 17, Ottawa City Council, ignoring that this is Greenbelt land, approved the location of the exposition hall without debate after many days of arduous discussions over the Lansdowne Park facility.

City planning staff has been encouraging the project, even denying that the area is a wetland and that it is habitat for Blanding's Turtles.

“A scientific report done this fall clearly shows this is a wetland, and many people over the last four years have identified Blanding’s Turtles, a threatened species, in the area,” says Cheryl Doran, a local resident. “We’ve even found a roadkilled juvenile Blanding’s which proves that they nest in the area, yet the City is completely ignoring this evidence in their rush to start the project.”

Currently, the Ministry of Natural Resources is undertaking a joint City of Ottawa/NCC sponsored evaluation of the adjacent Lester Wetland Complex to determine if it will designate it as a Provincially Significant Wetland. Yet, the City of Ottawa and the NCC are proceeding before the MNR has made a determination of the wetland boundaries, “If this kind of development keeps up there won’t be any wetland left to designate, or any species-at-risk in them,” Doran concludes.

Why is this facility being built in the Greenbelt?

“It would be a much better option to build this trade show exhibition centre near major public transit and closer to downtown,” said Sol Shuster. “There are more appropriate lands available, including sites in the Bayview area. We’re taking a huge expanse of asphalt for parking out of Lansdowne because, in the city’s own words, it’s an eyesore, and putting it in the Greenbelt. What will a 1,800 car park be used for when there are no trade shows going on? This is old style urban planning at its worst. When will Ottawa join the 21st Century? Clearly, not before we first destroy important natural areas in the Greenbelt.”

The NCC is in the process of reviewing its Master Plan for the Greenbelt and had declared a moratorium on approving any new projects until the review is completed. Public feedback to date has told them in overwhelming numbers that there should be “no new buildings in the Greenbelt.” Why is the NCC not protecting this Greenbelt wetland? Are their public consultations just a sham?

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Background

Greenbelt Coalition Members: <http://www.greenbeltcoalition.ca/member-profiles/>
Dugal-Topp Report of 24 September 2010 (PDF attached)
October 1, 2010 NCC Letter to the City (PDF attached)