

March 23, 2021 – Paul Doner – Doner Farms deputation to Richmond Hill Council

## DEPUTATION To Richmond Council to address the Provincial Consultation on Growing the Greenbelt.

Thank you for your time and consideration to allow me to address this issue today. Likely you all know who I am, but for the purpose of the official record, allow me to introduce myself. My name is Paul Doner, along with other members of my family we operate John Doner Limited. Our company is a farm operation and grain elevator located at 12119 Leslie Street in the City of Richmond Hill. Currently, we farm approximately 1,800 acres, spread across 5 municipalities in York Region. My brothers and I are the 8<sup>th</sup> generation of our family to farm this land. For more than 200 years, our family has shown our commitment to agriculture and farming; a commitment that we hope will continue for many generations to follow.

I have recently been made aware of a Provincial Consultation on Growing the Size of the Greenbelt, a review that greatly impacts the agriculture industry. I ask myself, why does the Province want to expand the Greenbelt, when the current Greenbelt policies are not working as intended. Since the inception of the Greenbelt, many farmers, including my family, have been vocally opposed to legislation that limits the use of land identified as agriculture. This is because legislation of this nature, while initially well intentioned, does not address the real problems now facing the agriculture and farming industry in areas that are being affected by urban growth.

To date our pleas have been ignored.

Here are some things for you to consider:

- There is less agricultural land in the Province of Ontario today than when the Greenbelt legislation was first enacted. This is because the need for urban growth still exists, but instead of allowing the development to naturally occur spreading from Toronto, into places such as Richmond Hill, a Greenbelt roadblock was erected. This caused the development to leap-frog into areas such as Keswick and Bradford, resulting in agricultural areas that are fragmented. The Greenbelt, if it worked properly, should have prevented this fragmentation. Now rather than addressing this issue we are looking to expand the greenbelt without evaluating its effect on our agricultural industry and farming community, further adding to our problem.
- In Richmond Hill, more than 300 acres of land that we farmed, has been removed from productive agriculture in favour of reforestation on lands owned and controlled by TRCA. The TRCA was our second largest landlord at one time, now we no longer farm their lands. If part of the greenbelt's mandate is to protect agricultural land why has this reforestation been permitted and what purpose did it serve? Do not allow the Provincial government to deceive the general public into thinking that the Greenbelt is good for farming as this reforestation destroyed some of our very best farmland.
- Restricting some lands for agricultural use only, when surrounding nearby lands are being urbanized, does nothing to address the ever-increasing average age of the Ontario farmer, which in York Region according to a 2016 census was 57 years old. There are very few young

farmers, looking at the customer base that we serve with our agricultural services. Only three operations have a primary decision maker under the age of 50. What happens to this protected land upon the retirement of those farmers? The reality of the industry is that more farmers are leaving the business than entering it. It does not matter what rules are passed to “protect” agricultural land if there is no one to farm it and no farming community to support it. Remember “agriculture” is not just a land-use designation, it is people, who apply their skills to the land. If the industry is profitable the people and will continue to farm and protect the land without the need for legislation.

Today, I am here to ask you, as members of the Richmond Hill City Council, to show your support for maintaining a future for agriculture and to show that you support the people who participate in agriculture industry in York region and throughout Ontario. You can do this by requesting that the province actually evaluate the legislation that restricts our land use and not blindly try to expand the greenbelt without taking stock of its actual effectiveness and reviewing its impact on the agriculture industry and farming community in our area of the Province. A “one size fits all” policy does not work.

I am asking that the City of Richmond Hill lobby the Regional, and Provincial governments and to show them the severe **negative** impacts that greenbelt legislation has on agriculture with the hopes that a serious review of the overall plan is conducted, and that elements that are out-of-date or simply not working can be addressed. My hope is that through your lobbying efforts instead of expanding the greenbelt we can actually open it up and put the development back where it should

be, in the GTA, thereby protecting our rural communities without the need for this legislation.

As you know my family is actively attempting to get the land-use designation on our farm under the Oak Ridges Moraine Act changed from “Countryside” to “Settlement” area. Under the current designation, the only potential buyer is another farmer. No farmer would buy this property because no crop can be grown that would generate enough revenue to finance the purchase. Expanding the Greenbelt is only going to lead other farmers into the same situation as we currently face. Remove the restrictions and yes, some farmers near urban centers will sell to developers, however, they will then turn around and buy farmland in rural communities with the proceeds, ensuring that they and potentially future generations of their family will have the opportunity to continue farming.

Through your Municipal Comprehensive Review, City Plan 2041, this matter can be addressed and the City’s representatives at York Region should request that this also be done as part of the York Region Municipal Comprehensive Review as well.

Thank you for your time and consideration of my presentation.