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Bonnie Lysyk  
Office of the Auditor General of Ontario  
Suite 1530  
20 Dundas Street West  
Toronto, ON M5G 2C2

November 24, 2022

Dear Ms. Lysyk,

Earlier this month, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing proposed to remove 7,400 acres of land from the Greenbelt plan, allowing for urban development on what is currently protected land. The government has also proposed the repeal of the *Duffins Rouge Agricultural Preserve Act*. This repeal would remove protections from 4,500 acres of prime farmland that the government proposes to remove from the Greenbelt.

The removal of protections from these lands would instantly shift immense wealth onto the landowners, without requiring even a single home to be built. The difference in land values between protected farmland and unprotected developable land can be orders of magnitude.

For example, one powerful landowner, Silvio DeGasperi, purchased a reported 1,300 acres of protected farmland within the Duffins Rouge Agricultural Preserve (DRAP) nearly two decades ago for about \$6,600 an acre, after the Harris government sold these publicly-owned properties at a discounted price with the claimed purpose of returning the land to farmers. When Mr. DeGasperi subsequently acquired these discounted properties, they had easements protecting them as farmland in perpetuity. He immediately began lobbying to have these protections removed, which the City of Pickering did in 2005, contrary to a binding 1999 agreement between the City, the Region of Durham and the province of Ontario that these lands would forever remain farmland. This decision forced the provincial government to pass the *Duffins Rouge Agricultural Preserve Act* in 2005, restoring the farmland protections. Mr. DeGasperi told the National Post in 2005 that without the protections these lands would be worth \$100,000 an acre. The speculative gains from removing these protections are no doubt even higher today.

The removal of Greenbelt lands also has several significant long-term environmental consequences, including threatening the integrity of interconnected natural and agricultural systems. Environmental experts warn that removing pieces of the Greenbelt threatens all of it.

There have been several investigative reports by the media identifying the suspicious timing of recent purchases of Greenbelt land by powerful landowners with donor and political ties to the Ontario PC Party. More than half the properties proposed for removal have been purchased

since the PC Party formed government in 2018. A company associated with powerful developer Michael Rice purchased Greenbelt land in King Township just two months before the government's Greenbelt announcement.

Both Mr. DeGasperis and Mr. Rice are prominent donors to the PC Party of Ontario. In addition, the chair of the PC Party's political donation fund is Tony Miele, who oversaw the 1999 sale of discounted DRAP farm lands as president of the Ontario Realty Corporation.

We are requesting your office conduct a value-for-money audit investigating how much wealth would be increased for property owners when their lands are removed from the Greenbelt, thereby enabling profitable rezoning, and whether this wealth transfer is in the public interest. Additionally, we are requesting your office investigate the economic and environmental impacts on agricultural and natural systems.

During your investigation, we also request that you consider Sections 2 and 3 of the *Members Integrity Act*, which deal with MPP conflicts of interest and the sharing of insider information and refer any evidence of misconduct to the appropriate authorities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Marit Stiles', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Marit Stiles, MPP  
Davenport