

King councillor praises farmers, stresses importance of plan review on TV show

By Mark Pavilons

As the province launches its 2015 review into the Green



belt and Oak Ridges Moraine plans, the subject got a boost on national TV recently from a King councillor.

Ward 6 Councillor and farmer Avia Eek appeared on The Agenda with Steve Paikin on TVO.

The topic was 'A Decade of the Greenbelt' and the segment included Ontario Environment Commissioner Gord Miller and Toronto planning chief Jennifer Keesmaat.

'What a tremendous opportunity to have the voice of one of the farmers in the Greenbelt heard,' Eek said.

Eek admitted she was a bit nervous and excited about on-air interview. She prepared by obtaining some information from King's planning department as well as the Greater Toronto Area Agricultural Action Committee.

Wearing her trademark carrot earrings, Eek was her bubbly and vocal self, kicking off the segment with a bang.

Eek noted the Greenbelt plan review has been on the minds of planning, agricultural, and environmental folks for some time now.

The Greenbelt is a very restrictive piece of land use policy which was created 10 years ago with a view to protecting farmland and the environment.

The broad Greenbelt band protects against the loss and fragmentation of the agricultural land base and supports agriculture as the predominant land use.

It also 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.

The 'Protected Countryside' areas of the Greenbelt protect specialty crop area land base while allowing supportive infrastructure and value added uses necessary for sustainable agricultural uses and activities.

It vows to protect prime agricultural areas by preventing further fragmentation and loss of the agricultural land base caused by lot creation and the redesignation of prime agricultural areas. It does have provisions for the appropriate flexibility to allow for agriculture-related and secondary uses.

The Greenbelt also serves to protect and restore the natural and open space connections between the Oak Ridges Moraine, the Niagara Escarpment, Lake Ontario, Lake Simcoe and the major river valley lands, while also maintaining connections to the broader natural systems of southern Ontario beyond the Golden Horseshoe such as the Great Lakes Coast, the Carolinian Zone, the Lake Erie Basin, the Kawartha Highlands and the Algonquin to Adirondacks Corridor.

Eek noted that last year, the Concerned Citizens of King Township (CCKT) put together a panel of people to talk about the environmental component of the Greenbelt Plan, including guest Gord Miller. It also featured improvements and ways to measure whether or not the Greenbelt is working.

York Region undertook a workshop involving municipalities, environmental, farm organizations, etc. with a view to compiling information on what has worked in the Greenbelt within York Region, and where possible improvements could be made.

The discussion of the Greenbelt review is being raised at the meetings Eek attends where agriculture is the main focus.

'I am urging all farmers, in all sectors of Ontario agriculture within the Greenbelt, to make a point of attending, or at least submitting your comments with respect to what is working, what should be changed, how we can move to the next step of farmland preservation by retaining and expanding the viability of agriculture within the Greenbelt,' she said. 'After all, part of the intent of the Greenbelt Plan was to preserve farmland. On its own, preserving the prime agricultural lands, soil classes 1-4, does not solve all

that ails Ontario agriculture, but is only one small component. Farmers need to be allowed to make a living on this farmland, or the exercise in saving it is pretty much futile.

?The Greenbelt: has created a level of uncertainty for farmers. Support for Agriculture is not clearly articulated in the Plan; recognition of the value of agricultural land to provide ecological goods and services; should allow for growth/strength of the local food movement; should make it clear the interdependency of the economies between urban and rural/agricultural areas; and has slowed down urban sprawl and the loss of some agricultural lands to development.?

To view this interview go to: YouTube Video: [YouTube.com/watch?v=3qDhD0XxCPM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3qDhD0XxCPM)