



Report to: Development Services Committee

Meeting Date: April 19, 2021

SUBJECT: Provincial Consultation Comments: Growing the Size of the Greenbelt (ERO 019-3136)

PREPARED BY: Marg Wouters, MCIP, RPP, Senior Manager, Policy & Research, ext 2909

RECOMMENDATION:

1. That the report entitled “Provincial Consultation Comments: Growing the Size of the Greenbelt (ERO 019-3136)” dated April 19, 2021 be received;
2. That this report be forwarded to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH) and York Region as the City of Markham’s comments on ERO posting 019-3136 and as an expression of continued support for the Greenbelt Plan;
3. And further, that Staff be authorized and directed to do all things necessary to give effect to this resolution.

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this report is to provide comments on the Province’s ‘Growing the Size of the Greenbelt’ consultation. The Province is seeking input on adding lands within the Paris Galt Moraine to the Greenbelt (Guelph area) and ideas for adding, expanding and further protecting Urban River Valleys.

BACKGROUND:

On February 17, 2021 the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH) launched consultation on growing the size of the Greenbelt through ERO Notice 019-3136. MMAH is seeking feedback on ways to grow the size and further enhance the quality of the Greenbelt. The component of the consultation that affects Markham is the request for ideas for adding, expanding and further protecting Urban River Valleys. The consultation period ends on April 19, 2021.

OPTIONS/ DISCUSSION:

The Province has identified the principles for this review, which include:

1. No consideration of removal requests or land exchanges
2. No consideration of policy changes
3. Supports Greenbelt Plan objectives, vision and goals
4. Follows existing amendment process
5. Connects physically and/or functionally to the current Greenbelt
6. Considers impacts on existing provincial priorities

Greenbelt Expansion

There are no additional lands in Markham that meet the criteria for Greenbelt expansion at this time. Most of the City's natural heritage lands that are not already in the Greenbelt are contained within the City's Greenway designation and are already protected through policies in the Official Plan. As such, staff do not recommend a Greenbelt (Protected Countryside) expansion be considered in Markham at this time. City staff will review opportunities to expand the Greenbelt during the next Markham Official Plan Review.

Greenbelt Urban River Valley Designation

The Urban River Valley (URV) designation was introduced through Amendment No. 1 to the Greenbelt Plan in 2013, and applies to watercourses within the urban area which generally connect the Greenbelt's protected countryside lands to Lake Ontario and inland lakes.

The Greenbelt Plan currently identifies 21 Urban River Valleys and associated coastal wetlands. Six of these are located within Markham as listed below and shown in Figure 1:

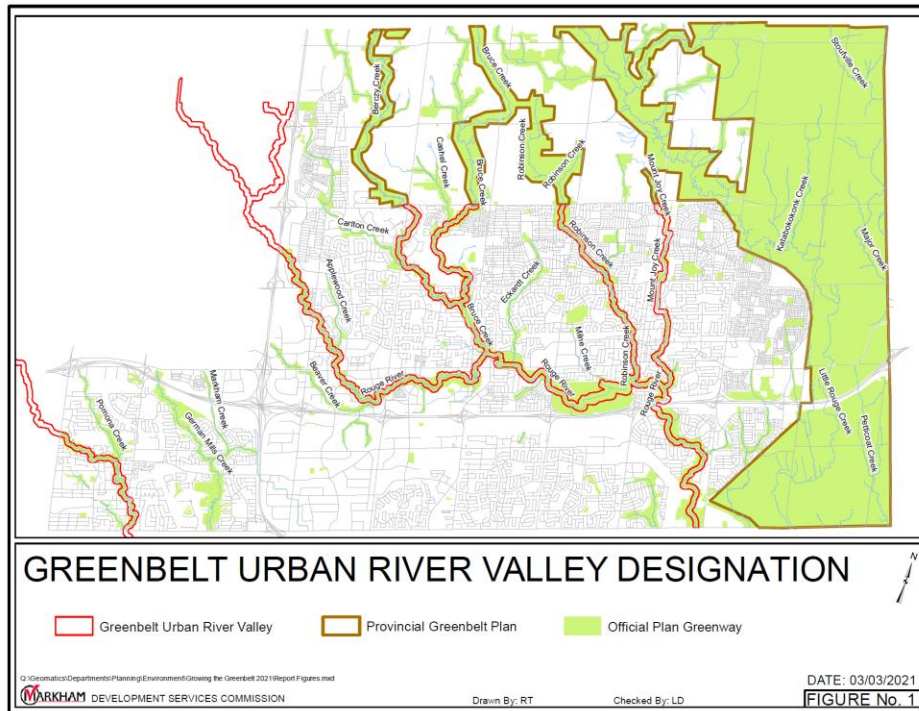
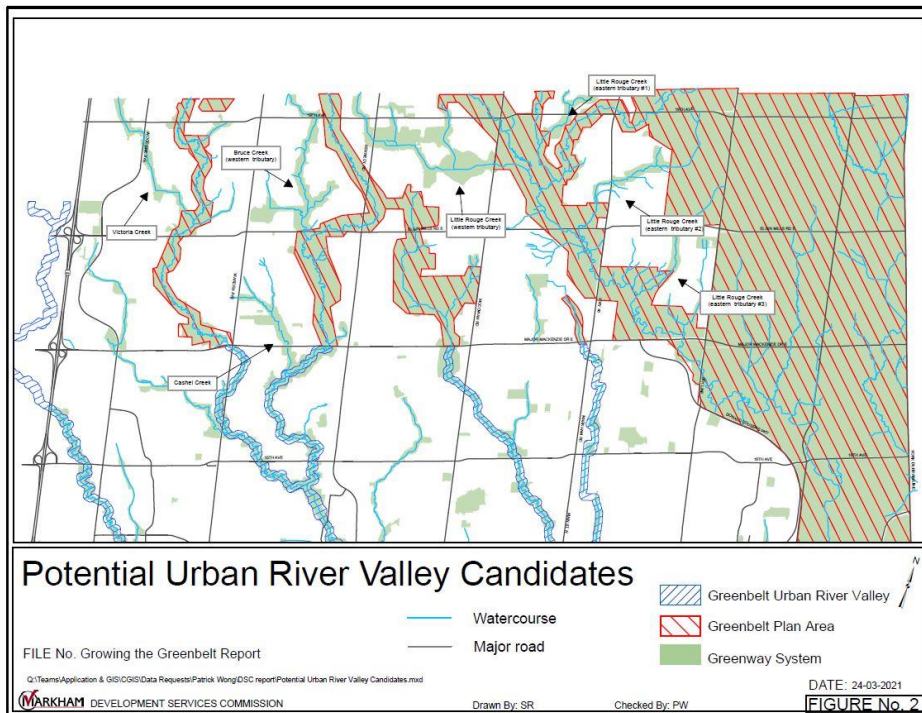
- Don River (East Branch)
- Rouge River
- Berczy Creek (south of Major Mackenzie Drive)
- Bruce Creek (south of Major Mackenzie Drive)
- Robinson Creek (south of Major Mackenzie Drive)
- Mount Joy Creek (south of Major Mackenzie Drive)

The Urban River Valley corridor is not a surveyed boundary but rather a continuous, conceptual boundary measured 60 metres from the water's edge on both sides of a watercourse (generally a 120 metre corridor). The 120 metre corridor does not factor into defining the limit of development.

The URV policies, which apply only to the publicly owned lands within this designation, defer to the applicable policies of municipal official plans for the protection and management of these lands. Therefore, it is the policies of Markham's Official Plan, and not the Protected Countryside or Natural Heritage System policies of the Greenbelt Plan, that continue to prevail over these lands. In addition, where the URV designation extends beyond the City's Greenway designation the City's Greenway designation and delineation policies still prevail.

Benefits of URV designation to the City

Although the URV designation does not provide additional environmental protection, it provides the benefit of the Greenbelt branding which illustrates the importance of these watercourses as linkages to the larger protected Greenbelt, thus providing a positive contribution to Markham's natural heritage program. The designated URVs may also benefit from funding support for education events and for restoration and enhancement of the lands. The City has provided signage for the URVs in Markham that are already designated in the Greenbelt Plan.

Figure 1: Existing Greenbelt Urban River Valleys in Markham**Figure 2: Potential Urban River Valley Candidates in Markham**

Staff recommend that the potential for additional URV designations in Markham be considered comprehensively as part of Markham's next Official Plan Review

The six watercourses in Markham that were designated as URV in 2013 were within the boundary of Markham's Urban Area at the time, generally south of Major Mackenzie Drive. These will be reflected in the City's Official Plan as part of the next Official Plan Review.

Since the 2013 URV amendment to the Greenbelt Plan, additional lands have been added to Markham's Urban Area through the 2014 Official Plan, namely the Future Urban Area (FUA) lands north of Major Mackenzie Drive. Additional urban expansion north of Major Mackenzie Drive is now being proposed by the Region to meet growth forecasts to 2051.

The main tributaries of the Berczy, Bruce, Robinson and Little Rouge Creeks north of Major Mackenzie Drive are already part of the of the Greenbelt as shown in Figure 1. However there may be opportunities for additional URV designations on watercourses feeding into these major Creeks both north and south of Major Mackenzie Drive as shown in Figure 2. These watercourses are currently protected through the Greenway System policies in the Official Plan.

Staff continue to be supportive of the Greenbelt Plan and the URV designation but recommend that any additional URV designations within the City be considered comprehensively as part of the next Official Plan Review rather than through this 60-day ERO consultation. Staff will also consider the merits of including privately owned lands within the URV designation at that time. Recommendations arising from the OP Review would form input to the Province during the next provincial comprehensive review of the Greenbelt Plan. Staff note that the City also has the opportunity, through the Region, to submit a request to the Province to add URV designations at any time prior to the next provincial review of the Greenbelt Plan.

It is recommended that this report be forwarded to the Province as Markham's comments regarding ERO 019-3136 as an expression of continued support for the Greenbelt Plan and the Urban River Valley designation.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS:

There are no financial implications related to the recommendations of this report.

HUMAN RESOURCES CONSIDERATIONS:

Not applicable.

ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:

The Provincial Greenbelt Plan supports the City's efforts to provide improved protection of the natural heritage system and green spaces as components of a linked natural heritage system

BUSINESS UNITS CONSULTED AND AFFECTED:

The Planning and Urban Design Department was consulted in the preparation of this report.

RECOMMENDED BY:

Arvin Prasad, MCIP, RPP
Commissioner of Development Services

FIGURES:

- Figure 1: Existing Greenbelt Urban River Valleys in Markham
- Figure 2: Potential Urban River Valley Candidates in Markham