

BUILDING BY DECADES



DAVID WILKES
PRESIDENT & CEO OF BILD

The Building Industry and Land Development Association, as the successor of the Toronto Home Builders' Association, is celebrating its 100th anniversary this year. To mark this important milestone, BILD has partnered with the Toronto Star to produce a decade-by-decade retrospective of our industry's contribution to the growth of the cities and towns of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). The 2000s saw the implementation of policies that would shape development in the region for decades.

The first was the introduction of the provincial Growth Plan in 2006. It was born out of a realization that the GTA had consistently been one of the fastest-growing regions in North America, and this would likely continue to be the case. In fact, current projections show that Toronto and the GTA will be home to 13.5 million people and 6.4 million jobs by 2051. The Growth Plan and its subsequent iterations have been efforts to intelligently plan for this rapid growth.

The Growth Plan directs where growth should occur—preferably around existing infrastructure and transit, to maximize return on investment and minimize environmental footprint. It also specifies increased densities for housing and employment to encourage efficient use of land and the development of complete communities. Looking at development that occurred after the introduction of the Growth Plan, there can be little doubt that industry complied with the spirit and intent of the policy. However, friction with residents over the building of new, denser developments in existing neighborhoods remains

a barrier to achieving the provincial objective.

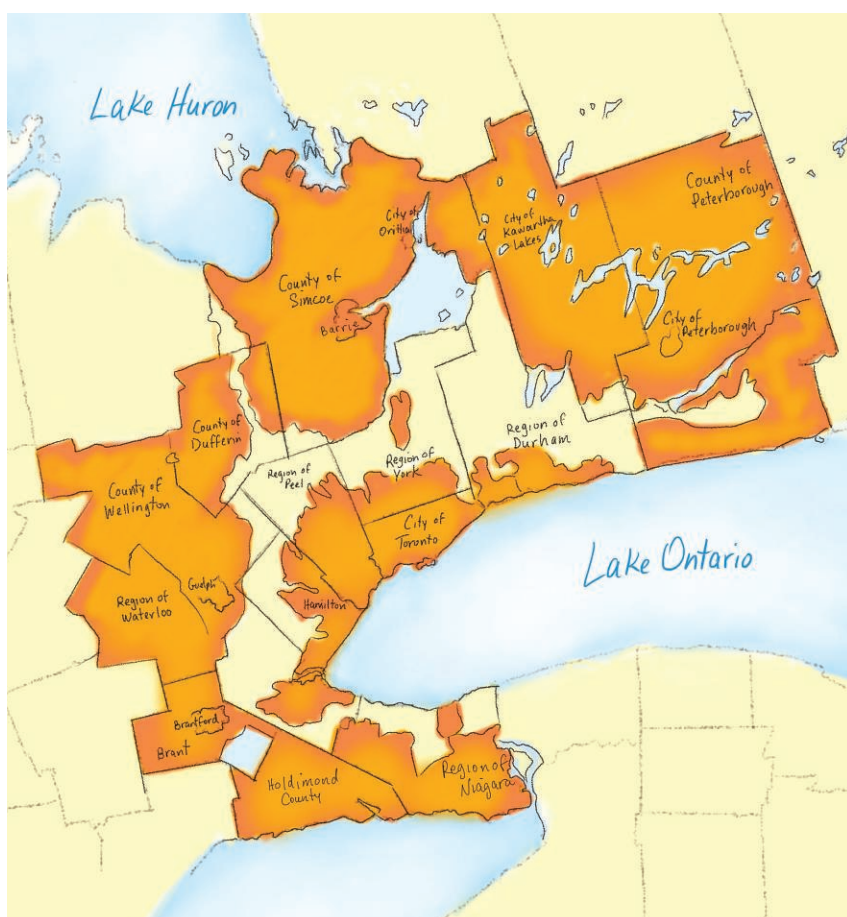
The second significant policy development of the 2000s was the implementation of the Greenbelt. Created in 2005, the 7,200 km² Greenbelt doesn't just protect land, but also acts as a water preserve, overseeing tributaries and headwaters, as well as groundwater reserves. It is the largest preserve of its kind in North America, if not the world.

With land within the Greenbelt off the table for development, and the region's population set to practically double in the next 30 years, there has been a tension in planning debates around how to accommodate growth in the land that remains, namely the whitebelt. This is land that is outside municipal boundaries but not included in the Greenbelt. To suggest, as some do, that double the population can be accommodated within the same built-up areas, without the expansion of municipal boundaries into the whitebelt, is shortsighted. This approach will hamper the region economically and undermine our quality of life.

On the association front, in 2001, the Greater Toronto Home Builders' Association (GTHBA) established RenoMark to identify professional contractors and address the concerns of homeowners looking for a reputable renovator. In 2006, GTHBA and the Urban Development Institute/Ontario merged to create GTHBA-UDI, bringing together the building and development arms of the industry. Shortly after, this new group searched for appropriate branding and a name that would best represent its work. Thus, the Building Industry and Land Development Association (BILD), as we know it today, was created.

PLACES TO GROW

The GTA looks to the future at the turn of the new century



An artist's rendering of a map showing the Greater Golden Horseshoe area in the 2000s. Illustration by Suzana Esteves

This article is based on an interview with Matthew Cory, principal of planning firm Malone Given Parsons (MGP).

Projections that Toronto and the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) will be home to 13.5 million people and 6.4 million jobs by 2051 make this one of the fastest growing regions in North America.

In 2006, in an effort to intelligently plan for this rapid growth, the province introduced two planning tools: the *Places to Grow Act* and the Growth Plan. These documents may not feature prominently in people's daily conversations, but they define the rules of how our region grows and where that growth should take place. By encouraging higher density around major transit stations and already built-up areas, the aim of the Growth Plan was (and is) to try to manage growth, reduce vehicle use, and create more complete, mixed communities. The *Places to Grow Act*, meanwhile, enables the development of regional growth plans that guide government investments and land use planning policies.

And although the plans were good and objectives solid, as with most things, there were unintended consequences. In 2018, the Building Industry and Land Development Association (BILD), together with the planning firm Malone Given Parsons (MGP), released a land-supply analysis, which revealed densities had increased in newly planned greenfield areas, centres and corridors along major transit routes – high-rise condos in the downtown core and areas like Yonge-Eglinton. It also showed that some mid-rise construction had occurred along the city's major traffic corridors – all part of the plan and on target. But existing single-family neighbourhoods, in what

is known as the “yellowbelt” (inner suburbs like Etobicoke, North York and Scarborough), were lagging far behind in intensification and related density increases.

Toronto's official plan allows mid-rise – four to 12 stories – along major corridors such as Danforth Ave., Queen St. and College St. This gentle density increase, through stacked townhomes and low-rise apartments, maximizes the use of infrastructure and transit, while delivering much needed housing.

With growth designated in areas around transit stations, there has been a lot of development in locations other than the usual downtown ones – Wilson Heights, for example, around the subway station. The neighbourhood has been earmarked for regeneration on the city's master plan, so when the University-Spadina subway line was extended to Vaughan Metropolitan Centre, a commuter parking lot near the Wilson subway station became available. It quickly became the site of a new condo project that used landscaping to encourage foot traffic in the community – and a reduced reliance on cars.

On a provincial scale there have been similar outcomes. In the 2017 version of the plan, language was removed that permitted intensification throughout built-up areas. Combined with existing municipal policies that permitted new housing only if it was of the type that was already predominant in the neighbourhood, this inadvertently restricted missing-middle unit types such as semis, townhomes or low-rise apartments. In 2019 and 2020, the Growth Plan was amended to permit intensification once again throughout the built-up area, but local resistance to change in existing


(Continued on pg. 2)

THE BILD
CORNERSTONE

Stafford Homes and the Goldman Group of Companies
2000

RenoMark
2001

SCAN TO SEE OUR
DECADE-BY-DECADE TIMELINE



2000s

2001

City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 589, Item 181

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(Continued from pg. 1)

neighbourhoods remains a major challenge to implementing the plan.

Another element of the Growth Plan was to forecast growth in existing communities, and to designate 25 urban growth centres throughout southern Ontario. Growth would be further managed by intensifying densities in growth areas, such as the downtowns of Hamilton, St. Catharines, Pickering, Burlington, Kitchener and Guelph and areas within Toronto, like North York Centre and Yonge-Eglinton Centre.

Growth centres were designated around future transit stops, such as the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre. When the new subway station was constructed, and a 100-acre parcel of land surrounding it was planned as a new mixed-use residential-commercial community, densities skyrocketed.

High demand for living close to work and play with access to rapid transit is creating situations like this that exceed densities. The Vaughan Metropolitan Centre is a prime example of what happens when you build a subway stop where there was none before.

This creates the density imbalance between high-rise and low-rise communities. The potential solution is to encourage density in the low-rise neighbourhoods.

All the municipalities in the GTA need to allow gentle increases of densities in existing communities

as of right, particularly to house new residents within walking distance of amenities such as schools, parks and community centres.

In a growing area like the GTA, people need somewhere to live. What you want to prevent is mono use – large tracts of land taken up by single uses, like homes, which are unconnected to any retail, workplace, or transit, making residents completely reliant on vehicles.

In Canada, municipal governments rely on the private sector to build communities – it's just the social contract in Canada and the economic arrangement we've worked out. But to achieve this better community of mixed use and mixed housing type, it has to be a team effort, with existing residents and municipal governments playing an important part.

New growth areas must be intelligently planned for today while allowing for evolving to mixed-use urbanity in future. Part of the planning process is looking at ways to reinforce values that will encourage a good and inclusive society through the built form.

The *Places to Grow Act* and the Growth Plan are designed to guide that growth and are playing a central part in where we live, work and play.

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BEYOND THE CITY: MARKHAM IN THE 2000s

In 2006, with Mayor Frank Scarpitti at the helm, Markham announced plans to consolidate its expansive landscape into a new planned downtown. Dense, transit-friendly and decidedly mixed-use, the community hub was designed to bring a more urban component to the municipality, enhancing its appeal and bolstering its civic identity. Of course, the city has a much longer history that led to the creation of this wide landscape. In 1791, John Graves Simcoe, the first lieutenant governor of Upper Canada, wanted to improve military security in the area, which was the impetus for building Yonge Street – a historic street that has had an impact on Markham ever since.

In the 1800s, the land was settled by Europeans, who were reliant on farming and agricultural industries. But soon after the Second World War, the Township of Markham began to feel the growth effects from Toronto, which was experiencing a post-war baby boom. Already industrialized – thanks to the war effort – the area attracted Toronto commuters and new immigrants from around the world. The pace of development quickened in the 1970s with the opening of Highway 404, and in 1971 the township became the Town of Markham, absorbed into the Regional Municipality of York. Since then, its population has quintupled in size, with new subdivisions constructed to house this rapidly growing population.

To define a downtown, Markham put out a request for new developments with high density and more growth along Highway 7. In 2006, the town announced plans for a new Downtown Markham, which resulted in a 243-acre urban centre and master-planned community with condos, townhomes, office space and high-end retail in a pedestrian-friendly neighbourhood. Connected to major roadways, public transit and the Unionville GO Station, the new downtown provides a unique mix of amenities, public spaces and public art. It's also near York University's new Markham Centre campus, opening in fall 2023.

In 2012, Markham officially changed its status from town to city. Along with the newly created Downtown Markham, the city is made up of six main communities based on the original 19th century settlements, including Berczy Village, Cornell, Markham Village, Milliken, Thornhill and Unionville. Branding itself as Canada's High Tech Capital, Markham is home to more than 1,000 technology and life sciences companies, with IBM being the city's largest employer. With its population forecast to grow to 420,000 residents by 2031, Markham's philosophy toward sustainable growth is based on building more compact, mixed-use communities that address the economic and social needs of the people who live there.

THE BILD CORNERSTONE	Waterfront Toronto Revitalization Corp. begins 2001	Shane Homes & Developments (Shane Renovations) 2001	Oak Ridges Moraine Act introduced 2001
Brownfields Statute Law Amendment Act introduced 2001	Cityzen 2002	Eurodale Developments (Eurodale Design + Build) 2003	SevernWoods Construction (SevernWoods Fine Homes) 2004
Strong Communities Act 2004	Wellings Planning Consultants Inc. 2005	Greenbelt 2005	Regent Park Revitalization Project commences 2005
		Mizrahi Developments 2005	Golden Bee Homes Inc. 2005

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Tracing the GTA's housing designs from the 1930s to the 2000s

STYLE FINDS A HOME

A residential street in Toronto in the early 2000s. In the last 100 years, the city has seen an array of architectural styles come and go. Toronto Star, Boris Spremo / Contributor

Toronto's attention to laneway houses may be all the rage at the moment, but it's by no means new. By the turn of the millennium, just over 20 years ago, laneway housing was top of mind for architects and urban planners, as it presented a unique solution for the city's increasing population and limited space.

In the last 100 years, the city has seen an array of architectural styles come and go – and, in some cases, return – all adapted for culture, demographics and topography.

In the 1930s, new homes were built small – even smaller than those built before the First World War, and designed in the bungalow style, preferred for its square construction and minimal ornamentation.

Although the bungalow traces its roots to the British colonial period in India, where expats lived in Bengali-style one-story homes with wide porches, the ones in Toronto arrived via California as early as 1910. Distinguished for their comfortable interior proportions, sloped roofs, and wide porches, there were several variations of the style.

Bungalow examples abound in the city today, throughout the Beaches – a few still overlooking the lake – as well as Riverdale, North Toronto (especially Leaside), along the Danforth, throughout High Park, and later examples in Scarborough

and East York. A big part of their appeal was the fact that they were inexpensive to build, and some homeowners could even build their own using a mail-order kit that came with plans and materials.

During and after the Second World War, of course, Toronto saw the rise of the now infamous Victory Houses. Modest, unassuming and practical, Victory Houses embodied the sensibility of the time and city in which they were built, and can still be seen across the Greater Toronto Area to this day. Constructed on what were once the city's fringes, the typically one-and-a-half story homes are synonymous with 1940s Toronto, where their charmingly simple design overturned the way houses had been constructed and how people lived.

By the 1960s, people who'd grown up in the suburbs were coming back to the city for work and play, and needed inexpensive housing in the form of apartments. At the time, most apartments were either large luxury blocks, or flats above retail stores on major corridors. This period marked high-rise construction, particularly in the style of French architect Le Corbusier. His concept of Towers in the Park – apartment towers set back from the street and surrounded by parkland – can be seen throughout the city and smaller suburban centres.

Newly introduced tax laws in the 1970s, and later rent control measures, led to investors getting rid of their apartment holdings, which led to people considering condo ownership instead of renting. The condo boom of the mid-1980s was short-lived, though, with the recession of the late 1980s. By the mid-1990s, the economy had bounced back and condos took off and have never really tapered off.

Many factors contributed to the population growth of the city – the rise of the tech sector, infrastructure investment, and simply that the GTA is a great place to live. But all these people needed places to live, and fueled a condo boom that has created the greatest alteration to the city's architecture. It's also given rise to a select group of renowned architects who not only changed the skyline but also demonstrated how possible it is to live in smaller, more efficiently designed spaces.

By the end of the decade, the city was largely comprised of single-family neighbourhoods next to towers clustered around transit (major transit stations) and retail hubs. A later study (2017) by the Canadian Centre for Economic Analysis found that 45 per cent of GTHA residents live in detached homes and 35 per cent in apartment buildings, with very little in between.

This led to coining the phrase “missing

middle” – mid-rise housing of six to ten stories, either multi-family/apartments or stacked towns. These are effective for increasing densities without building high-rises.

Approximately 30,000 detached units were being built annually in the late 1990s and early 2000s in the GTA. And in the mid-2000s the province introduced legislation and policy – notably the Growth Plan – that prompted higher densities, namely building up rather than building out.

By the 2000s, downsizing became a buzzword – especially with the aging demographic – and small containable spaces were the norm, especially with Gen Y and Z, who grew accustomed to small condo spaces – and the maintenance-free lifestyle.

Also during this period, to accommodate the density requirements under the Growth Plan, there has been a resurgence of the venerable townhouse and the introduction of newer built forms such as stacked towns. The word townhouse goes back to early England, where the term referred to a dwelling a family (usually gentry) kept “in town” (meaning London) while their primary residence was in the country. Today, it more modestly refers to a single-family dwelling with at least two floors that share a wall with another house. Use of these built forms makes new communities (even those in the suburbs) far more compact and efficient compared to the development of previous decades.

But humans are ever resourceful and creative, and by the new century, two housing styles emerged from this land shortage. One is the wee house – also known as the tiny house – built on wheels for easy transport. Though not allowed within city limits for zoning reasons, it has become a noted trend.

And there's the ubiquitous laneway house. Built on odd little tracts of land – triangles or small sections carved out of a larger lot – these have helped maintain Toronto's idiosyncratic style. They've also added to the healthy mix of styles the city is known for and which reflects our diverse heritage.

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THE BILD CORNERSTONE	Alair Homes Enterprises 2006	Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe 2006	Endangered Species Act 2007	GTHBA and UDI merge to form BILD 2007
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RENAISSANCE

CULTURAL

The early 2000s see a bounty of investment in culture's construction



The controversial Michael Lee-Chin Crystal at the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) on Bloor St. W. Toronto Star, David Cooper / Contributor

What a difference two decades have made. Drive, walk, or cycle around the city these days, and you'll see clear evidence of Toronto's Cultural Renaissance. Ever since the early 2000s, cultural icons have been filling in the cityscape: Frank Gehry's glass ship's prow jutting over Dundas St., Daniel Libeskind's Crystal at the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM), OCAD University's iconic cube magically suspended, Diamond and Schmitt's spectacular glass staircase at the Four Seasons Centre, and the pristine ice-glass towers of the National Ballet School shielding historic brick homes on its site, to name a few.

These and so many other landmarks are the considerable fruits of the SuperBuild initiative, a five-year, \$20 billion infrastructure plan. Launched in 2003 and administered through the Ontario SuperBuild Corporation, the program was intended to deal with the province's aging infrastructure.

In addition to the invaluable upgrades to highways, hospitals and universities, some of the most visible benefits of the program were to the city's major cultural institutions. Vaunted buildings like the ROM, the AGO, the Royal Conservatory, the National Ballet School, and the Four Seasons Centre for Performing Arts were newly built, or had significant facelifts.

As architect Bruce Kuwabara notes, the SuperBuild program was the "largest public investment in public culture Canada has ever seen."

His firm – Kuwabara Payne McKenna Blumberg Architects (KPMB) – was responsible for several of the projects: Gardiner Museum, Koerner Hall at the Royal Conservatory of Music, TIFF Bell Lightbox and the brand new National Ballet School.

For Kuwabara, these landmarks are about contributing to the fabric of the city. He says for every major building proposal, his team carefully considers how cities work.

The National Ballet School, at 350 Jarvis Street on the site of the original Havergeral College, is a good example of this. Initially turned down by SuperBuild because it wasn't a cultural institution (later overturned due to the heavy lobbying by the school's administrators), it was also beset by heritage issues.

Three historical buildings had to be worked into the overall plan like an ensemble of characters on a stage, according to Kuwabara.

The building has been an anchor in the revitalization of Jarvis Street, especially since its courtyard encourages pedestrian circulation through the block, and dance studios in the glass towers allow passersby to watch dancers practice. Lowering the base of those towers allowed a visual relationship to occur between the school and the site's three heritage buildings. Situated on either side of the 1856 Northfield House, they embrace the central heritage structure like arms in ballet's second position.

Combining uses into a hybrid project was possible with the TIFF Bell Lightbox. What was once a parking lot on King St. W. now combines retail, theatres, reception areas, catering and condo units.

One of SuperBuild's strengths was the program's ability to bring partners together.

This private-public partnership idea was certainly instrumental in the AGO's refurbishment. The art gallery had seen several renovations and expansions over its more than 100-year history. Canadian-born celebrity architect Frank Gehry had a vision for the building that was to pull it back to the primary memory of Walker Court.

Instead of building a separate wing, Gehry connected the new space to the original 1918 Beaux-Arts structure, through ramps, walkways and a spectacular serpentine staircase. The new glass façade juts out like a ship's prow – and reflects both the pedestrians on the sidewalk and the Victorian homes across the street, fulfilling Gehry's desire to relate architecture to the community.

The world was taking notice. In a 2008

New York Times review of the revamped building, the AGO was described as, "one of Mr. Gehry's most gentle and self-possessed designs...its billowing glass facade, which evokes a crystal ship drifting through the city, is a masterly example of how to breathe life into a staid old structure."

Buildings like these would hit the high notes for any city. Apart from the tourism benefits, there's the civic pride they generate, which is particularly important considering 81 per cent of Canadians now live in an urban setting. And although this surge in cultural building and infrastructure wasn't exclusive to Toronto at the time, these early-2000s projects helped bolster the city's global reputation, and demonstrated the international reach of Canadian architectural talent.

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The Art Gallery of Ontario has been described as one of Frank Gehry's most gentle and self-possessed designs. City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 589, Item 191

THE BILD
CORNERSTONE

Mark Jackson
& Associates Inc.
2007

Royal Ontario Museum
(ROM) expansion
2007

ADI
Developments Group
2007

Greening
Homes Ltd.
2007

THE GREENBELT BALANCE

The GTA lives – and grows – amidst the largest protected land in the world

Residents of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) are rightly proud of being green. The 7,200 km² Greenbelt, created in 2005, doesn't just protect land – it's also a water preserve that oversees tributaries and headwaters, as well as the groundwater reserves that flow under the greenbelt lands.

The Oak Ridges Moraine, which is part of the Greenbelt, is of particular importance. It's one of the province's most significant landforms, providing water resources as well as diverse plant and animal habitat. The province is currently proposing to grow the Greenbelt through additions of the Paris-Galt moraine and publicly owned urban river valleys.

While the obvious benefit of the Greenbelt is to preserve biodiversity of sensitive land, the ultimate gain is for people. Simply put, providing green space contributes to the health and well-being of residents, because getting out in nature is essential for physical and mental health.

Stretching from Peterborough to Niagara-on-the-Lake, and hugging the most populated areas, the Greenbelt offers ample access to forests, wetlands, lakes, parks and trails. Right in the heart of Toronto, for example, the Leslie Street Spit sees a daily influx of residents cycling, hiking, picnicking and swimming.

The Greenbelt was created to manage growth and protect environmentally sensitive areas. With the companion Growth

Plan directing more dense development within existing urban boundaries and to build up not out, the Greenbelt has done an admirable job of protecting and enhancing Ontario's natural heritage.

However, the GTA also expects an additional 3 million people to move here over the next 20 years – over 4 million in the next 30 years, if planning out to 2051. And since people need places to live and work, the region's residential and commercial needs must be considered. That's why the Building Industry and Land Development Association (BILD) and the Ontario Home Builders' Association (OHBA) recently requested that the provincial government balance its proposed Greenbelt expansion – announced in February – with ensuring the region's land supply for future growth by designating land surrounding existing municipal boundaries or the "whitebelt" (a planning term for this type of land), and not within the Greenbelt, as a land reserve to accommodate future growth.

The squeeze that the Greenbelt has placed on available land, combined with the requirements for denser development within the Growth Plan, has had its advantages. Increased densities have forced creative solutions like mixed-land-use, greatly increased densities for new high- and low-rise communities and smart urban planning and home design. One only needs



The Greenbelt was created in 2005 to manage growth and protect environmentally sensitive areas. Toronto Star, Rick Madonik / Contributor

to look at a new community being built and compare it to the lots and neighbourhoods in North York, Etobicoke and Scarborough to realize how the new communities make highly efficient use of space to meet or exceed provincial requirements.

BILD supports the Greenbelt but there is a high degree of confusion among the public, fueled by those who oppose boundary expansion. It is not so much an issue of the Greenbelt squeezing land availability and costs, but rather the lack of expansion of municipal boundaries into the whitebelt to accommodate growth. Those opposed to municipal boundary expansion will leverage the public's lack of understanding of the difference between the whitebelt and the Greenbelt to confuse the discussion.

BILD believes in preserving the Greenbelt and expanding it when required, in a

logical manner. This means preserving the environment based on evidence and science, while at the same time considering all land needs and balancing the commercial and residential needs of the GTA, Canada's economic engine.

Protecting and enhancing the Greenbelt's existing borders is the aim of the current provincial government, which has promised to look into expanding within the required community and infrastructure planning of the Growth Plan and the *More Homes, More Choice Act*.

Arriving at an equitable, intelligent compromise will require a thoughtful response, an eye to the future needs of the GTA and informed discussions by all.

This content was funded and approved by the advertiser.

<p>THE BILD CORNERSTONE</p>	<p>Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO) Frank Gehry expansion 2008</p>	<p>DiamondCorp 2008</p>	<p>Metropia 2009</p>	<p>MOD Developments 2009</p>	<p>Ontario College of Trades Act 2009</p>
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