

Hi there,

The proposed plan by Shining Hills Estate Collection Inc. and the consideration that is being held by the Town of Newmarket to re-designate the Environmental Protection Area – Oak Ridges Moraine in order to justify the destruction of incredibly ecologically rich and increasingly threatened natural areas in the region is both incredibly short-sighted and irresponsible. Not only that, but this year we have seen increasing threats to the remaining healthy and intact ecosystems in Ontario and yielding to this developer request to build in this region is not the signal nor the appropriate response for the town to take as we find ourselves in the middle of a climate and ecological crisis. Despite it feeling as though the coronavirus crisis is one of the most challenging times that we have faced in a generation, not to downplay the situation at all, it is. But we have many more challenging times to come if we do not take the ecological and climate crises seriously.

Over 70% of southern Ontario's wetlands have been converted to alternative uses since European Settlement (NCC, 2020). That is not a number to be taken lightly. Wetlands are some of the most ecologically productive areas and, if monetary reasons to protect them are needed, have also been identified as the most monetarily valuable as well. The monetary value of wetlands and other natural areas was explored in the Ministry of Natural Resources 2009 report and many other academic articles since, I am happy to share. Wetlands provide diverse ecosystem services from filtering air and water, providing habitat for a wide diversity of plants and animals, supporting community mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual health, to providing many of the abiotic and biotic conditions that fundamentally each of our lives depend on. The trajectory of the last 150 years has shown that we have drastically undervalued these services, and if one is to learn anything from recent science and projections on ecosystem collapse, then business as usual is not a question and massive ecosystem restoration is required. You can see this in the designation of the years 2021-2030 as the UN's declared Decade on Ecosystem Restoration. With this perspective, the consideration of drawing back on protections for our few remaining intact ecosystems is completely backwards.

If monetary reason is the only reason the town can come up with to justify moving forward with this project then I strongly urge all those involved to look into the concepts of Natural Infrastructure, Conservation Finance, Doughnut Economics, Planetary Boundaries, Ecological Economics, and efforts being made by the Municipal Natural Assets Initiative. Additionally, it is notable to point out that the City of Nanaimo, BC just committed to embracing Kate Raworth's, from Oxford University, Doughnut Economics model. This is essentially shifting the fundamental goals of the city toward, "How can we operate within ecological limits while still advancing the Sustainable Development Goals in our communities?" The key transition here from current thinking is understanding that the economy operates within society and society operates within the environment, of which has ecological limits, that when are not respected can fundamentally threaten the functioning of society and the economy within it.

There is a reason that the Oak Ridges Moraine was designated as an Environmental Protection Area in 2003. The reason to keep this area protected has only grown stronger over time! Not the opposite.

Please reach out if I can be of any more help in this decision. I am happy to take a more vocal position as well. Additionally, I would happily share more resources about the topics I mentioned above, as I am actively researching Conservation Finance as a Research Assistant at the Ivey Business School alongside Dr. Diane-Laure Arjaliès and Dr. Wren Montgomery.

All the best,

Melanie Issett