

# faculty of environmental studies

## Graduate Students in Regional Planning| Studies of the Greater Golden Horseshoe Greenbelt Plan

Contemporary regional planning issues include: governance, growth management, transportation, food security, social justice, marketing and ecological values.

# GOVERNANCE

Through policy documents and political debate, the Greenbelt was framed as an exercise in growth management.

## Role of the Public in Making and Sustaining the Greenbelt

'Framing' the Greenbelt for the public:

- Why is the Greenbelt important?
- Who does it help?
- What is it doing?
- Why is it here?

Building an emotional connection between the Greater Golden Horseshoe's population and the Greenbelt:

- To ensure that people understand its importance
- To contact with the Greenbelt on a deeper level
- To push politicians to keep the Greenbelt stable for the long-term
- To ensure the future longevity of the Greenbelt

Greenbelts NEED to be understood as more than a land-use policy on a piece of paper to ensure the public takes a greater role in creating and sustaining Greenbelts.

### How do we achieve this?

#### Education

- Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation
- Tours of the Greenbelt
  - meet the locals
  - eat the food
  - experience the Greenbelt
- Instituting programs to teach our youth (Grade 1-8) about the Greenbelt and its importance on a wide variety of issues
- Building an emotional bond/connection with youth will create a greater chance that the next generation will fight for the growth and long-term survival of the Greenbelt

#### Outreach

- Label Greenbelt Fresh Produce in Ontario
  - creates an understanding of where our food comes from
  - emphasizes the importance of the Greenbelt when it comes to securing the Greater Golden Horseshoe's food supply
- Market the Greenbelt Plan and the Growth Plan as two sides of the same coin
  - Securing the Greater Golden Horseshoe's future
  - Greenbelt tells us where we can't grow, while the Growth Plan tells us where and how we must grow
  - An easier way to market density and connect people's emotional response with both the Greenbelt and the Growth Plan

## The Greenbelt as a policy discourse

### 1| Policy Framing

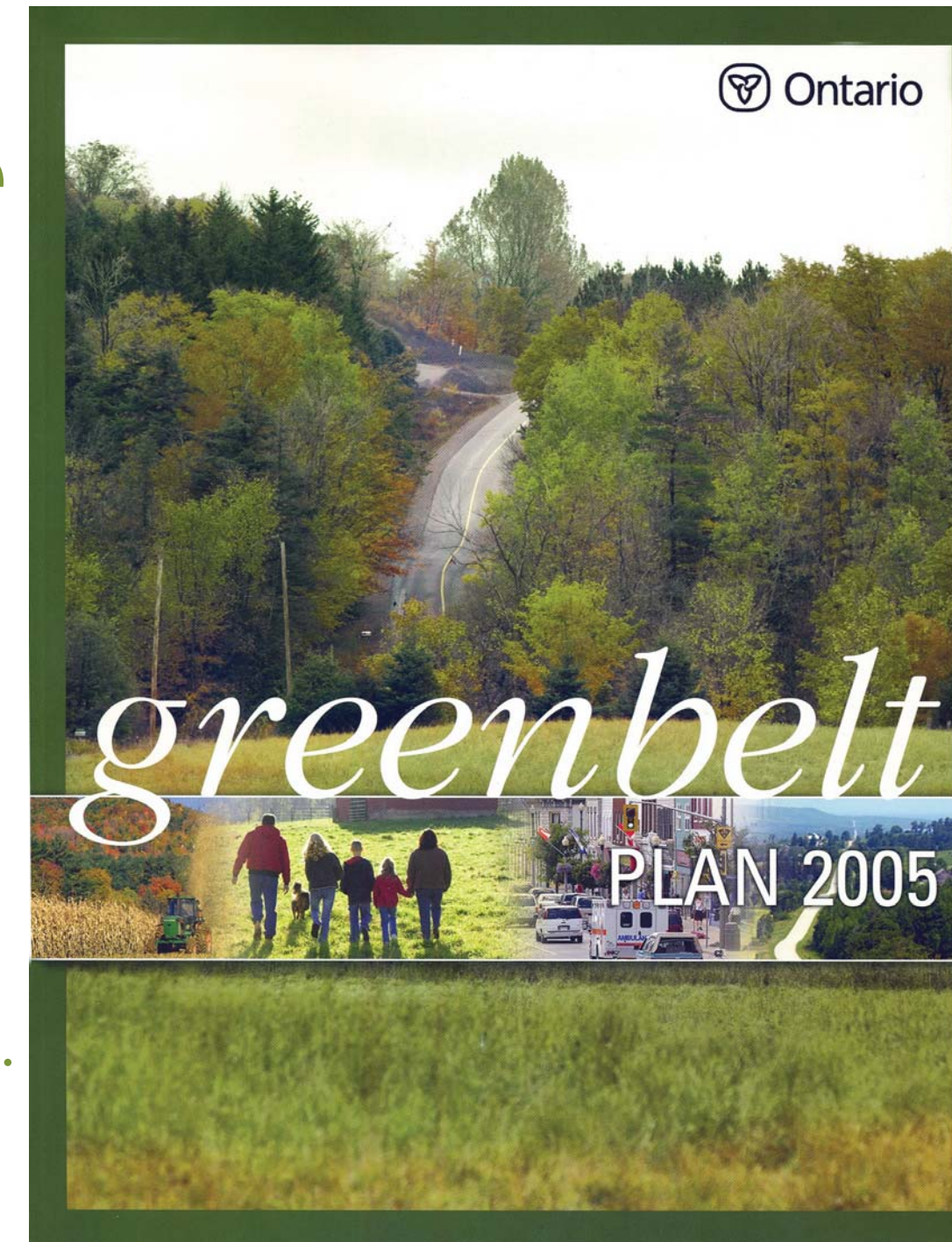
Rein and Schon (1991: 263) have written on the concept of 'policy framing', defining frames as, "...a way of selecting, organizing, interpreting, and making sense of a complex reality so as to provide guide posts for knowing, analyzing, persuading, and acting". They write that, "The complementary process of naming and framing socially constructs the situation, defines what is problematic about it, and suggests what courses of action are appropriate to it" (ibid, 270). Taking these two points together, a frame determines how information is collected and analyzed, how problems and solutions are defined, and lastly demonstrates that there is a social or subjective dimension to these actions.

A political dimension of policy formation is introduced through the concept of a "dominant frame" and the idea that policies achieve legitimacy through "hitching on" to a dominant frame (ibid, 268). Therefore, solution definitions can be elevated to the status of a "dominant frame" essentially shaping debate around a policy issue.

### 2| Policy Progression

Our research suggests that growth management was the "dominant frame" during policy debates about the Greenbelt. This can be seen through the continual reference to "limiting sprawl" and "concentrating growth" throughout policy documents and debates. The Greenbelt is first defined as a tool for growth management in the Liberal Party platform of 2003. This definition is expanded upon in a discussion paper by the Liberal Government-commissioned Greenbelt Task Force (2004) where it is noted that Ontario has a "strong" tradition of regional planning and that greenbelts are a key tool in growth management. In legislative debate during 2005, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing stated that the purpose of the Greenbelt is to "help curb sprawl" (Standing Committee on General Government, 2005).

The early adoption and continued reference to the Greenbelt as a tool of growth management established this policy approach as the "Dominant frame". Its position as the "dominant frame" was solidified through its adoption by the governing party. Perhaps most significantly, the persistence of this "dominant frame" suggests that early definitions of a policy problem are critical in shaping debate and determining what ideas have legitimacy.



## Greenbelt: Ontario's Planning Policy Revolution

The Greenbelt Act, 2005 represents one component in a planning policy revolution enacted under the new Government of Ontario that took office in 2003. The government of Ontario undertook a series of legislative and administrative reforms aimed at protecting a variety of public goods, from agricultural lands and ecosystem services to renewable and non-renewable exploitable resources. Central to these protections was the necessity for growth management. Accordingly, the province's growth management reforms and urban growth boundary are interdependent. The primary elements of legislative restructuring are as follows:

### Greenbelt Protection Act, 2004

- Designated and froze development within a survey area
- Repealed when replaced by the Greenbelt Act, 2005

### Strong Communities (Planning Amendment) Act, 2005

- Increased conformity standard of municipal plans relative to provincial guidelines
- Defined 'areas of settlement' and reestablished 'matters of provincial interest'

### Provincial Policy Statement, 2005

- Demanded efficient land development patterns
- Required mixed urban uses, high densities and efficient infrastructure in growth areas

### Greenbelt Act, 2005

- Established a 'permanent' area of green space
- Created the Greenbelt Plan

### Greenbelt Plan, 2005

- Restricted development in 'Protected Countryside' and previously protected areas
- Maintained special protections in Niagara Escarpment and Oak Ridges Moraine

### Places to Grow Act, 2005

- Created a Growth Plan and growth plan areas with specific development targets
- Demanded conformity of municipal official plans

### Places to Grow: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (2006)

- Required compact development and urban intensification
- In urban growth centres, implemented a strong smart growth strategy

### Planning and Conservation Land Statute Law Amendment Act, 2006

- Demanded conformity of municipal council, board and OMB decisions with PPS 2005
- Restricted the ability of OMB to modify official plans

These legislative and administrative changes represent a significant departure from the previous regime. Previously, development was largely controlled by municipalities, and the Ontario Municipal Board exercised considerable flexibility in interpreting and enforcing provincial guidelines. Under the new regime, the province exercises considerable control and promotes long term regional interests over smaller scale, short term investment and development interests.

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