

# Ottawa's Greenbelt Master Plan 1995 - 2015

## National Capital Commission

*The National Capital Greenbelt surrounds Ottawa and is a unique mosaic of adjoining lands which serve a variety of functions. Paramount among these uses are the recreational trail and core natural area components which enhance the region's livability. As population and urban growth expand on the National Capital Region's periphery however, there is concern about encroaching development and how it will affect the ecological integrity of the Greenbelt. This case study looks at the public planning process that assisted in determining the future vision for the shape and use of this unique urban form.*

### Development Context

The Greenbelt, as seen in Figure 1, is a crescent-shaped patchwork of farms, fields, forests, and research complexes bordering the City of Ottawa and parts of Nepean and Gloucester. It was conceived in 1950 by Parisian architect-planner Jacques Gréber as a means to shape the expanding urban Capital and to provide a reserve of land for future public and private institutions. By 1966, when land purchases were complete, several organizations had already located in the Greenbelt, including Bell Northern Research (1960) and Agriculture Canada (1966). In 1961, the National Capital Commission (NCC) entered into a 50-year forest management agreement with the Government of Ontario, and much of the Greenbelt's abandoned and the marginal farmland has since been reforested. Surviving farms have become larger as a result, and the number of houses in the Greenbelt has declined. Today, one third of NCC-owned lands are leased to tenants for a variety of uses ranging from farms to municipally run recreation facilities, and approximately 8,000 people work and 1,000 people live in the Greenbelt.

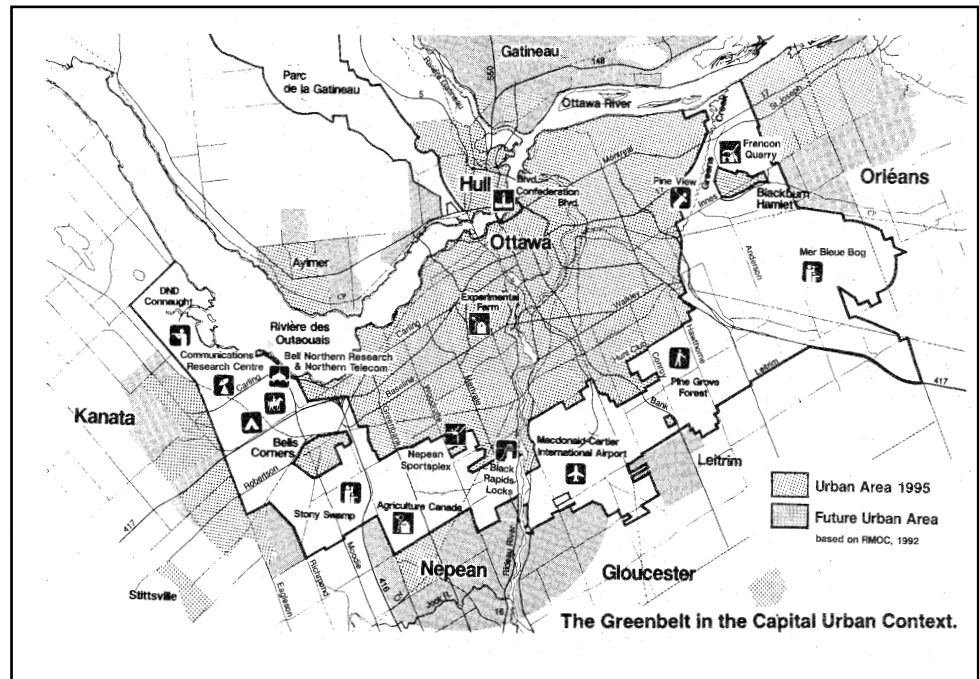


Figure 1

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## Planning and Design Issues

The National Capital Commission (NCC) is a federal Crown corporation. The National Capital Act obliges the NCC to improve, develop, and conserve the National Capital for the benefit of all Canadians, to communicate Canada to Canadians, and to promote the Capital as a meeting place for Canadians. A number of factors gave rise to the Greenbelt Review and made it necessary at this particular time to consider and plan its future:

1. The NCC's revised mandate (1966) meant a shift from being a builder of the Capital to being an animator.
2. The changing regional context - specifically the growth of Kanata, Orléans, and Barrhaven as satellite cities on the outer edge of the Greenbelt - made it necessary to consider the Greenbelt in terms of an evolving region.
3. The NCC needed a decision-making tool to help manage the Greenbelt's diverse landscape (i.e. decisions relating to land uses - including recreation - leasing commitments, and the management of natural areas.)
4. Federal policies in the 1990s were changing in relation to the environment and because of financial restraint, new approaches were needed in order to manage public assets.
5. The Greenbelt Master Plan represents the first major review of the area since Gréber. The Plan, the provisions of which will be reflected in the Official Plan of the Regional Municipality of Ottawa-Carleton, will allow Greenbelt Managers to make the long-term commitments that are essential to protecting and renewing this valuable natural resource.

## Central Problem or Opportunity

The Master Plan will guide decisions taken with reference to land use, programming, and landscape character of the Greenbelt over a 20-year period from the adoption of the Plan in 1995. The Master Plan intends to enhance the speed of the NCC review processes and the quality of the results. It intends to create land uses that support the goals of both the NCC and of applicants for land use at the same time reducing property administration costs. Most importantly, the Master Plan intends to promote understanding of the great benefits that come from the Greenbelt to emphasize the need for careful stewardship.

## Actors and Stakeholders

Support for the review process has come from a number of sources — specifically the public, other levels of government, and the academic community. During the review period, the NCC held three public consultations,

not only with 11,000 residents and visitors to Canada's Capital Region, but also through the NCC's National Outreach Program which involved interested Canadians from across the country. In addition, the NCC had consulted repeatedly with other branches of government. Finally, experts in various subject areas have supported the review with specialized research. A prime concern throughout the process was the proper conduct of environmental assessment, as required by the Federal Government of Canada.

## Planning Goals and Objectives

In developing the Greenbelt Master Plan it was determined that the Greenbelt must have certain attributes if it was to meet the obligations implicit in the Master Plan and ensure the Greenbelt's continued usefulness and health. The goals were that:

- the Greenbelt must remain a large, rural, open space running in a continuous belt in roughly the present shape and location.
- the Greenbelt must be relevant to the Capital and to Canadians.
- the Greenbelt must remain in the public domain.
- the Greenbelt must maintain a diverse mix of uses and landscapes.
- areas with ecological significance or high renewable resource capability must be protected, as well as areas where significant investment has been made.
- the health and integrity of the Greenbelt must be maintained.
- the Greenbelt must continue to generate revenue.
- partnerships are essential to the maintenance of a healthy Greenbelt.

The specific objectives were to:

- make the Greenbelt more publicly accessible,
- enhance its role in the region's economy,
- enhance the protection of its environment.

## Decision Making Framework

The Master Plan was built around two zoning mechanisms. The first consists of seven land use designations that locate land uses and guide management decisions throughout the Greenbelt. The second is the Experiences Network, made up of a series of areas with special interest in terms of public programming and landscape character.

## Land Designations

Greenbelt land uses and activities are organized spatially in the Greenbelt according to seven land designations, and these relate to either natural, rural, or built systems within the Greenbelt. Land designations do not represent a single land use; rather, they refer to broad

functions that different parts of the Greenbelt perform in support of the Greenbelt concept. Thus, a range of uses may be allowed in a given designation, so long as they all contribute to making the Greenbelt work as intended. Each land designation has specific objectives and a unique range of supporting land uses and activities.

#	Land Use	Land Designations							
		C N A	B U F	L I N	C U L	R U R	F A C	I N F	
1	Cultural Landscape Features	L	M	M	H	H	L	L	
2	Cultural Built Features	M	M	M	H	H	M	L	
3	Archeology	L	M	M	M	M	L	L	
4	Recreation	L	M	M	L	H	L	L	
5	Interpretation/Education/ Research	H	M	M	M	H	M	L	
6	Conservation	H	H	H	M	M	L	L	
7	Drainage and Waterways	H	H	H	M	M	L	L	
8	Topography and Soils	H	H	H	H	H	M	L	
9	Agriculture		M	M	H	M	L	L	
10	Forestry		M	M	H	M	L	L	
11	Mineral Resources						L	L	
12	Facility- Intensive Uses						H		
13	Small-Scale Commercial		L	L	M	H	M	L	
14	Community-Oriented Facilities					L	L		
15	Residential Uses and Settlement Patterns		L	L	L	M	L	L	
16	Transportation Facilities		L	L	L	M	M	H	
17	Utilities		L	L	M	M	M	H	
18	Waste Management					L	L	L	

Figure 2

### Land Designations

- CNA** Core Natural Area
- BUF** Natural Area Buffer
- LIN** Natural Area Link
- CUL** Cultivated Landscape
- RUR** Rural Landscape
- FAC** Facility Zone
- INF** Infrastructure Corridor
  
- H** Highly important element within a particular designation
- M** Medium importance, but encouraged in lesser amounts than a primary use
- L** Low importance: special conditions may apply to ensure suitability
- Blank** Discouraged: generally prohibited because of incompatibility with designation objective

<b>Natural System</b>	Core Natural Area Natural Buffer Natural Linkage
<b>Rural System</b>	Cultivated Landscape Rural Landscape
<b>Built System</b>	Facility Infrastructure Corridor

### Experiences Network

The experiences network is divided into five categories that relate either to settings or activities and refer to areas with special visual or programming importance (see below). The intention is to conserve significant views that help to define the Capital's setting, to distinguish the Greenbelt more clearly from adjacent area; and to promote recreational and learning opportunities that capitalize on the Greenbelt's attributes.

<b>Capital Settings</b>	Panoramas Greenbelt Edges Capital Arrivals
<b>Public Activities</b>	Visitor Attractions Visitor Circulation

Each of the above five categories had specific objectives to guide public programming and/or landscape character. Specific elements in the Experiences Network are conditioned by the underlying land designation.

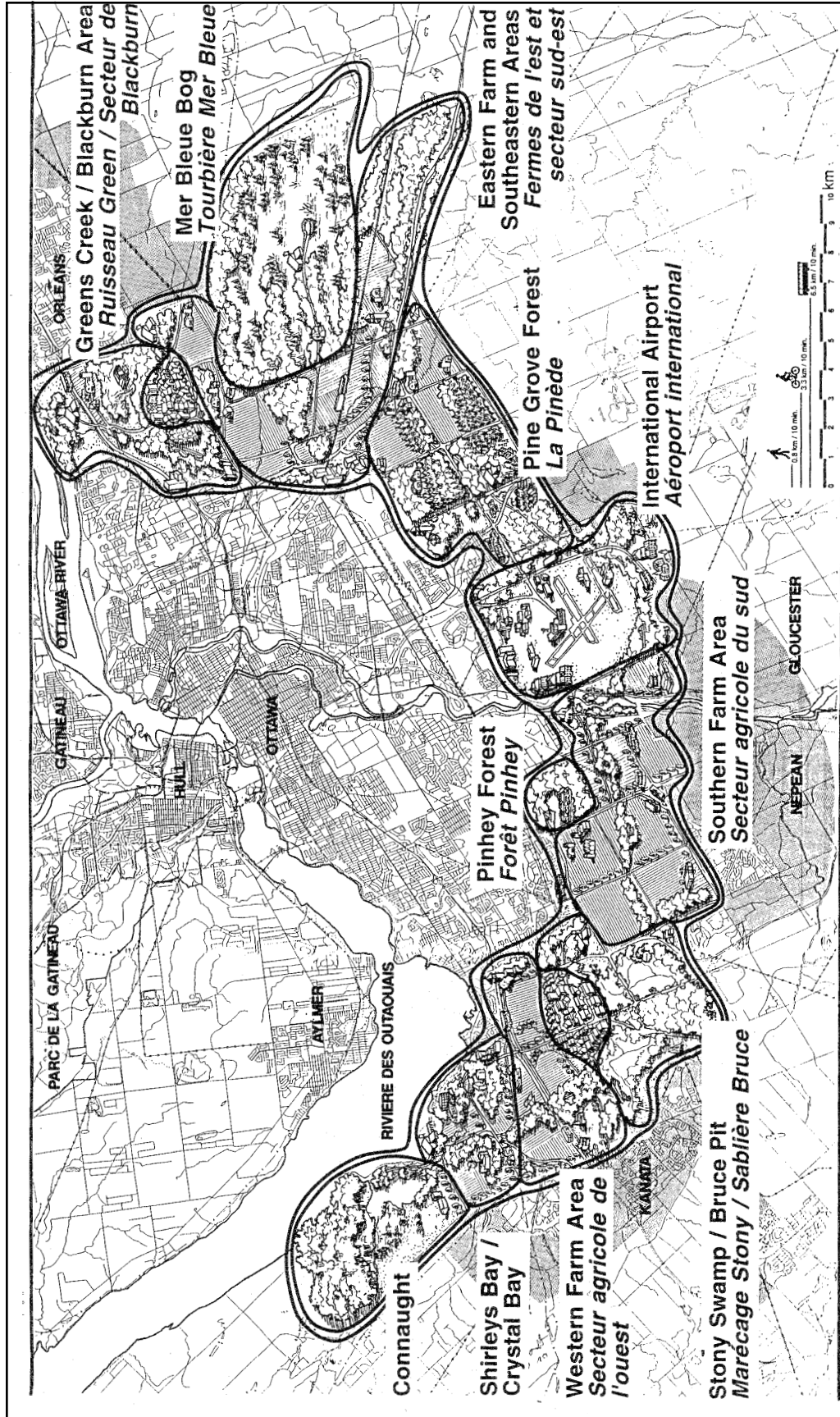
The table, Figure 2, shows where the objectives of the Experience Network should be consulted.

### Organizational Framework

For the purposes of organization and facilitation in the planning process, the Greenbelt was divided into eleven sectors as can be seen in Figure 3. There was a parallel environmental impact assessment process that followed the planning process and recommendations.

### Options for Action and Their Evaluation

In preparation for the Plan's development, the NCC commissioned a 600-person public opinion survey in September 1990 to gauge public awareness and opinion of the Greenbelt within the National Capital Region (NCR). Key findings from this survey indicated that the perception of the public was that the main purpose of the Greenbelt was to enhance the quality of life in the region. The Greenbelt was largely perceived as a park land and conservation area.



National Capital Commission / Commission de la Capitale nationale

**The National Capital Greenbelt / La Ceinture de verdure de la capitale nationale**

**Area Highlights / Principaux éléments des secteurs**

Figure 3

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Open houses held in January 1991 throughout the Ontario portion of the NCR introduced the Master Plan process to the public and highlighted important issues and trends that would affect the Greenbelt in the future. The public perceived the most important future functions of the Greenbelt to be protecting wildlife and wetlands and providing land for recreation, parks, agriculture, and forests.

During the Fall of 1991, 150 students at nine Canadian university schools of urban and regional planning developed master plans for the Greenbelt. This unique program provided the NCC with a national perspective on the future of the Greenbelt and generated ideas for the Master Plan. A February 1992 workshop held in the Capital concluded that the Greenbelt land uses and boundaries must evolve over time to best accommodate changes in the Capital Region's urban growth, economy, and community values. Partnerships with other levels of government and other bodies were seen as important factors behind the future success of the Greenbelt.

Open houses held in June 1992 and information displayed over the summer on Sussex Drive generated local comment on the students' work. Support for agriculture, mass transit corridors, integration of environmentally sensitive areas, and recreational activities inside the Greenbelt was strong. Student proposals that were not supported, such as a demonstration sustainable community, were dropped from further study.

In total, over 8,000 people participated, to varying degrees, over the first two phases of public consultation for the Greenbelt Master Plan. These local consultations, held during the Plan's development, have complemented national consultations. Adjustments to the Draft Master Plan presented at the last round of local consultations reflected a balance between the national and local perspectives of the Greenbelt's future.

## **Implementation Strategies**

Public comment and National Capital Commission response to the third consultation process are described under the following five Master Plan themes.

### **Distinctive Capital Setting**

Ways to heighten Greenbelt identity which minimize negative effects on the environment were favored. Roads as Greenbelt edges were not supported and the intent to delineate Greenbelt boundaries with roads will be removed from the final plan. Implementation strategies will include information signage on Capital Arrivals such as Highway 417 from Kanata.

### **Accessible Public Activities**

Recreation was widely supported although there was concern about golf courses which were often viewed as environmentally unfriendly and serving a small fraction of the community. There was also concern about commercializing the Greenbelt. Uses such as golf or sports fields will be retained in the rural landscape designation, but the areas in which they may occur will be further restricted. Lands within all designations that feature significant environmental characteristics will be protected with a special overlay entitled a "Valued Ecosystem Component (VEC)". These lands would be unavailable for such uses.

Visitor accommodation, visitor-related commerce, and a visitor circuit along scenic roads were the subject of some concern relating to the commercialization of the Greenbelt. Proposals were developed with some modifications to enhance visitor appreciation of the Greenbelt and provide accommodation of a rural nature.

### **Provide a Continuous Natural Environment**

Some respondents felt that some areas were omitted from the network, and that road closures may mean the building of new roads or increased capacity on existing roads which could be detrimental to the environment. The definition of core natural areas as large, self-sustaining ecosystems will not be changed. To protect important but isolated natural features, a "Value Ecosystem Component" overlay will be added outside core natural areas.

There was some concern regarding the removal or development of Greenbelt land to fund the protection of environmentally significant lands. Several waterways will receive strengthened protection. Recreational pathways and open space links into Ottawa will be identified.

### **Ensure a Vibrant Rural Community**

There was a general view that most economic activities, such as visitor accommodation, are better situated outside the Greenbelt. A reduction will be made to the cultivated landscape designation in the Pine Grove area in order to better reflect the capability of land for farming or productive forestry with development to be controlled at accommodation and visitor sites in Shirleys Bay and Mer Bleue Bog respectively.

### **Develop Compatible Built Facilities**

The proposed Research Park created a great deal of concern. Proposed development of the military and Blair/Innes lands was also opposed. Proposals to promote the careful development of certain Greenbelt lands adjacent to the airport received more support. All of the

above proposals, except for the airport lands development, were either removed completely or redesignated in the Master Plan. The phasing out of existing residential strip development and built uses in core natural areas were supported.

## Lessons Learned

The degree of involvement and energy from the public in the final round of public consultations attest to how much the Greenbelt is valued by residents of the Capital. Some issues were controversial, however, there was general support for the overall direction of the Master Plan and for specific proposals in most areas of the Greenbelt. Overwhelming support was expressed for more land to be brought into the Greenbelt and for the protection of farmland. Support for a variety of revenue generation mechanisms such as user fees came from some quarters, but caution was expressed over the potential commercialization of the Greenbelt. While many of these suggestions were beneficial, they generally would not materially improve the ability to cover the Federal Government's costs of maintaining the Greenbelt.

## Contact

Further information on the Greenbelt Master Plan may be obtained by contacting:

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The Centre for Environmental Design Research and Outreach (CEDRO) at The University of Calgary has prepared the case studies and participated in the realization of this initiative. Further information may be obtained by contacting the Centre for Environmental Design Research and Outreach at:

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