

# STOP SPRAWL DURHAM

## RESPONSE TO MAYOR ASHE'S REPLY TO SSD/RDGC OPEN LETTER

September 3, 2023

Many of you have received [a reply from Mayor Kevin Ashe's office](#) in response to the [OPEN LETTER](#) that was sent to Pickering Council on Tuesday, August 29, the day before the [Integrity Commissioner's new scathing report](#) on Minister Steve Clark, which should have again given Pickering Councillors pause regarding plans to bulldoze forward on the urbanization of the Duffins Rouge Ag Preserve.

Let's clear up a few things in [his reply](#) that are hard to see behind the flurry of the Mayor's hand-wringing:

***“The decision to remove lands from the Greenbelt was made within the authority of the Province of Ontario, and it seems like they intend to proceed with their decision.”***

[Mayor Ashe asked for Duffins Rouge Ag Preserve \(DRAP\) to be developed, as did former Mayor Dave Ryan on repeated occasions.](#) It is ridiculous to claim that Pickering is at the mercy of Queen's Park and moan that 'the Province is making us do it' when this is the very thing Ashe and some of his [donors](#) have asked for over many years. It was the City of Pickering that compromised the long-term agricultural stewardship of the DRAP area when it released the conservation easements in March 2005.

***“The role of Pickering Council now is to ensure that what happens from here on out is in the best interests of our citizens.”***

The role of Pickering Council is to be consistent with the unanimous vote of the new council on December 5, 2022. The public concluded after that late night that this was a united council opposed to unnecessary, costly, and unsustainable sprawl in the Greenbelt and, more specifically, the Duffins Rouge Agricultural Preserve. The role of Pickering Council is to now stand firm against threats to our natural areas, especially in the context of damning reports that detail how [offtrack the exercise of increasing housing supply](#) has been, and that the Greenbelt land isn't needed to build homes.

***“Clearly, the power to put these lands back into the Greenbelt is with the Province. However, the opportunity to protect the interests of the City and negotiate the best deal for our residents is with us.”***

Many watching this unfold are [anticipating that a Minister's Zoning Order](#) will be used to advance development applications for DRAP. The City will have little to no control over an MZO. The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing writes and signs them. Builders carry out the order directly from Queen's Park. [Attempts by previous municipal councils](#) to write in “affordable” and impact the outcome of what is built have not materialized as expected. Negotiating in secret and claiming to “protect the interests” of the City, and doing this with no consultation with residents, would seem to be not only aspirational but also imprudent and at the expense of Pickering residents.

***“And at this pivotal point in our history, we must learn from some very hard lessons that the City experienced in the past. In the early 2000's, Pickering Council was opposed to the development of significant portions of the Seaton lands. I was a Councillor at the time and witnessed first-hand the consequences of an all or nothing fight.”***

“[A]t this pivotal point in our history,” we are facing the triple emergencies of a climate crisis, a biodiversity crisis, and an affordability crisis. It is well understood that compromising the Greenbelt, and vast swathes of prime farmland and natural assets anywhere is an utterly foolish and irresponsible idea in the face of these existential threats. Given Mayor Ashe's long history on Pickering and Regional Councils, we expect that he would understand that sprawl costs more than compact urban development and gentle density, which could help ease the affordability crisis we are facing now. Councillors are expected to act in the best interest of the City and its citizens is to advocate to protect them in the face of these emergencies and help advance more affordable housing options. It is Ashe who seems to be making this an “all or nothing fight” by not articulating to the Minister and the Premier that [Pickering](#) made a mistake, on the heels of [many other Pickering mistakes \(see section 1540 of Hansard\)](#). Ashe and Pickering Councillors need to demand that DRAP is returned to the Greenbelt. Now!