



# CIVIC AFFAIRS

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## SECURING THE GREEN BELT

Fellow Citizens:

One of the strong arguments for establishing the Metropolitan Municipality was that a single corporation would be able to develop a metropolitan green belt where the County of York and the individual local municipalities had failed. Consequently, the new organization has been clothed with wide powers. The Act of Federation has made the Metropolitan Municipality the senior partner in a planning area which has since been defined to take in some 700 square miles--nearly three times the area of Metropolitan Toronto. The Act assumes that the new Planning Board will bring in an Official Plan including among other things the designation of green belts and park areas. Authority to secure green belt lands has been given to the Metropolitan Council. It may pass by-laws for acquiring and developing public parks, recreation areas, squares, avenues, boulevards and drives anywhere within the Metropolitan Municipality, the County of York, the County of Peel and Ontario County.

Between these two related responsibilities of the Metropolitan Toronto Planning Board and the Metropolitan Council there is a marked distinction. Green belt areas must be planned; plans may be implemented. Whether they are or not depends on public opinion as interpreted and acted upon by the Metropolitan Council.

In order to stimulate public interest in what was regarded as an essential undertaking, a one-day conference was recently convened under the sponsorship of four voluntary organizations. Out of these meetings came the decision to set up a continuing committee which has been called the "Committee on Open Space for Metropolitan Toronto". Operating as a committee of the Community Planning Association, its membership includes persons from the following organizations:

- \*Association of Women Electors
- Board of Trade of the City of Toronto
- Bureau of Municipal Research
- \*Community Planning Association of  
Canada, Greater Toronto Branch
- Conservation Council of Ontario
- Don Valley Conservation Association
- \*Local Council of Women
- Ontario Recreation Association

Toronto Anglers and Hunters Association  
Toronto Field Naturalist Club  
\*Welfare Council of Toronto and District

(\* Organizations that sponsored the one-day conference.)

On one point members of the committee have been unanimous. Development of green belt lands is regarded as an urgent need of the greater Toronto area. However, before launching any wide appeal for support of this objective it was agreed that the Metropolitan Council should be asked to work out definite proposals for acquiring and maintaining such lands. Committee members were anxious to learn what the proposed green belt would cost local taxpayers, how purchases would be financed and what provision would be made for managing the areas brought under public control.

It was decided, therefore, to invite the organizations with membership on the committee and others who might be interested to bring the problem to the attention of the Metropolitan Council. A suggested resolution was circulated

At its February meeting, your Bureau Council endorsed the resolution in the following form:

"Whereas there is an increasing danger of losing valuable land for parks, recreation and conservation to building development and misuse particularly within the proposed Green Belt, and

Whereas open space development covers a wide range of undertakings, including public works and certain conservation projects, the best co-ordination in administration and financing would be by a special Department responsible to Metropolitan Council through its Parks and Planning Committee.

Be it resolved that

- a. An appropriate amount be inserted in the 1954 budget of Metropolitan Council to buy proposed Green Belt properties which are under immediate threat of being lost to such use, and
- b. The Metropolitan Council develop a broad policy for acquiring park, recreation and Green Belt areas to serve Metropolitan Toronto, and consider the establishment of a Parks and Recreation Department with responsibility for acquiring and administering such areas."

To date, the same resolution or one with similar intent has been put forward by seven organizations, including one not represented on the committee (The Toronto and Lakeshore Labour Council). Action is expected by other bodies in the near future.

METROPOLITAN ASSESSMENTS

About three years ago, the Municipal Board recommended to the Ontario Government that steps be taken to develop a uniform assessment of real properties in the City of Toronto and the twelve adjacent suburbs. In the Board's opinion, the move was an essential prerequisite to the establishment of any type of metropolitan government. The Province's acceptance of the proposal resulted in the immediate establishment of the Greater Toronto Assessment Board. And since mid-1951, it has been engaged in making new valuations for a metropolitan assessment roll.

In recent months, the new assessments have become official--but not without appeals and protests against particular valuations fixed on individual properties by the provincial Board. No one who recognizes the magnitude and complexity of the re-assessment undertaking should be surprised by this fact. Some need for adjustments is to be expected. But the point that needs to be clarified is the extent of the inequities that now exist.

With the objective of promoting a speedy solution of this problem, your Bureau Council has authorized the following communication to the Chairman and Members of the Metropolitan Council.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

During recent weeks, a number of citizens have questioned the equity of valuations placed on certain suburban properties by the Greater Toronto Assessment Board in carrying out its re-assessment work. It has been claimed that differences between the new method of assessment used by the Board and the established system followed in the City of Toronto have resulted in major discrepancies with respect to industrial and older residential properties. The problem has been brought to the attention of the Metropolitan representatives and the discussions have been carried to the Prime Minister's office.

That some adjustments should be required following such an extensive undertaking as the re-assessment of all suburban properties is surely not surprising. When the Province undertook the assignment, it had only a small assessment staff. Consequently, most of the personnel required for the Toronto undertaking had to be newly engaged and trained for the work. On the other hand, while some differences appear to have been definitely established, it should be noted that the extent of changes needed to bring uniformity is not known. Attention has been focused on inequalities affecting only two types of properties; but it may well be that differences will be found to extend to other types of properties as well. Consequently, nothing less than a comprehensive review of valuations will be sufficient to ensure substantial equity.

It is our understanding that the Metropolitan Council and the Metropolitan Assessment Department already see the need for a review of assessments throughout the metropolitan area. The Bureau is fully in accord with such a plan but is disturbed at the suggestion that the work is to be extended over a three year period. In our opinion the importance of the problem would justify speeding up the review of suburban assessments with the objective of placing city and suburban properties on a common basis of valuation by the end of 1954.

There is no doubt that the intended review of suburban assessments is a major undertaking. The work will be reduced somewhat by the use that can be made of the Greater Toronto Assessment Board's field review of suburban properties. As well, the particular experience of those former suburban assessors who are being absorbed into the Metropolitan Department should be helpful. On the other hand, the Metropolitan Commissioner faces a heavy organizational programme. Where suburban assessors are not available for transfer, others must be assigned to strange territory. The Commissioner has also to integrate City and suburban staffs and to school suburban personnel in the methods followed by his Department. Consequently, it will take some time to prepare for and launch a review of suburban valuations.

The Bureau realizes that additional problems are presented by its proposed time schedule. Further additions to staff will have to be authorized. The budget for the Assessment Department will have to be increased. Recruiting of suitable personnel for such a short-term assignment will not be easy and, indeed, may not prove entirely possible. The organizational burden placed on the Commissioner and his lieutenants will be considerably greater. What is more, the return of the 1954 rolls may have to be held up for some weeks. The delay might even affect the striking of the 1955 tax rate and lead to the necessity for additional short-term borrowing. But, with all these difficulties, the decision would seem fully justified if equity and certainty in taxation can thereby be quickly restored.

The Bureau therefore proposes that the Council authorize the necessary funds to carry out the review of suburban assessments in one year rather than three. It is suggested, also, that the Metropolitan Municipality might approach the Province of Ontario for some financial assistance. The Bureau recognizes that the Province has already given strong support, financial and otherwise, to the development of Metropolitan government for the greater Toronto area. It seems logical, therefore, to ask for their further help to expedite uniformity of assessment.

Yours faithfully,

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