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[HOME](#) ›

Greenbelt Report Card 2006

The first year of Ontario's 1.8 million acre Golden Horseshoe Greenbelt has been a success, according to a new report released February 28, 2006, by the Ontario Greenbelt Alliance, though many areas still need improvement. While the report card gives the Ontario government an overall grade of "B," ongoing plans to expand and build new highways, critical natural areas still in need of protection, and uncertainty around municipal compliance with the Greenbelt Plan continue to be of concern.

"This is a report card that any student would be proud to bring home to their parents," said Dr. Rick Smith, Executive Director of Environmental Defence. "But there's still plenty of room for improvement. A world-class Greenbelt deserves nothing less than an "A" effort."

The report, Greenbelt Report Card: Grading Implementation and Progress in Year 1, grades the provincial government in five key areas: protecting the Top 10 Greenbelt Hotspots ("B-"); dealing with challenges from municipalities ("Incomplete"); making the Greenbelt 'greener' ("B+"); expanding and building highways ("D"); and, ensuring adequate resources ("A").

"The provincial government and Halton Region have been outstanding in protecting invaluable woodlands and other natural areas in North Oakville," said Rob Burton, President of Clear the Air Coalition Inc. in Oakville. "Now if the province would only intervene in the Ontario Municipal Board case, we could make their grade an A+."

Of the Top 10 Greenbelt Hotspots, first identified by the Ontario Greenbelt Alliance in April 2004, six receive a passing grade, two get a failing one and two are graded "Incomplete." Boyd Park, in Vaughan, gets the only "A+" thanks to a recent Ontario government decision stopping a highway that would have cut through the park. The proposed North Leslie development, in Richmond Hill, gets an "F" as the government has protected only half of the area deemed environmentally significant. An "Incomplete" grade goes to Simcoe County because it's too early to judge recent steps taken by the Ontario government to protect the area from poorly planned development.

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"The day the Ontario government stopped the Pine Valley Drive highway extension was a great day for Boyd Park and an even better day for the Greenbelt. It sent a strong message to local governments that the Greenbelt will not be compromised," said Deborah Schulte, Co-Chair of Friends of Boyd Park. "This is just what was needed to give Ontarians something to celebrate on the Greenbelt's First Anniversary."

The Greenbelt Report Card gives the lowest grade ("D") for ongoing proposals to expand or build highways that would cut through sections of the Greenbelt. "A large, bold conservation initiative such as the Golden Horseshoe Greenbelt is bound to suffer a few bumps on the road, especially in its first year," said Wendy Francis, Ontario Nature's Director of Conservation and Science. "However, overall, the early results are positive. The Greenbelt is not only starting to have an impact on the ground, but also is serving as a great learning experience for green space-first land use planning across Ontario."

Report Card Highlights: Some Top Hotspots

Boyd Park and Pine Valley - Road stopped: A+
King City - Big pipe sewer extension: D
North Leslie - Massive subdivision: F
Structuring for Success - Greenbelt Foundation and Council: A
Total Grade for the Greenbelt: B

About the Ontario Greenbelt Alliance:

The Ontario Greenbelt Alliance is a diverse multi-stakeholder coalition of over 75 organizations who share a common vision for protecting and expanding the Golden Horseshoe Greenbelt.

The complete Greenbelt Report Card: Grading Implementation and Progress in Year 1 is available to download for free on the Ontario Greenbelt Alliance web site, www.greenbelt.ca.

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