

OAKVILLE'S MERTON LANDS - UNDER THREAT

What and where are the Merton Lands?

You know them best as Deerfield Golf Course, Saw Whet Golf Course and environmentally sensitive Fourteen Mile Creek Valley. They also include natural features associated with Bronte Creek, land owned by the Province, Region of Halton, Town of Oakville and a few privately owned properties (see map). Together they total 234 hectares (425 acres), and represent the largest and most beautiful swath of undeveloped land south of Dundas.

What's the threat?

A developer has bought Saw Whet Golf Course, the province is considering its options for Deerfield Golf Course, and the town is coordinating an overall study of the area. These lands could see widespread development and environmental degradation.

Where do Councillors Elgar and Lapworth stand on the issue?

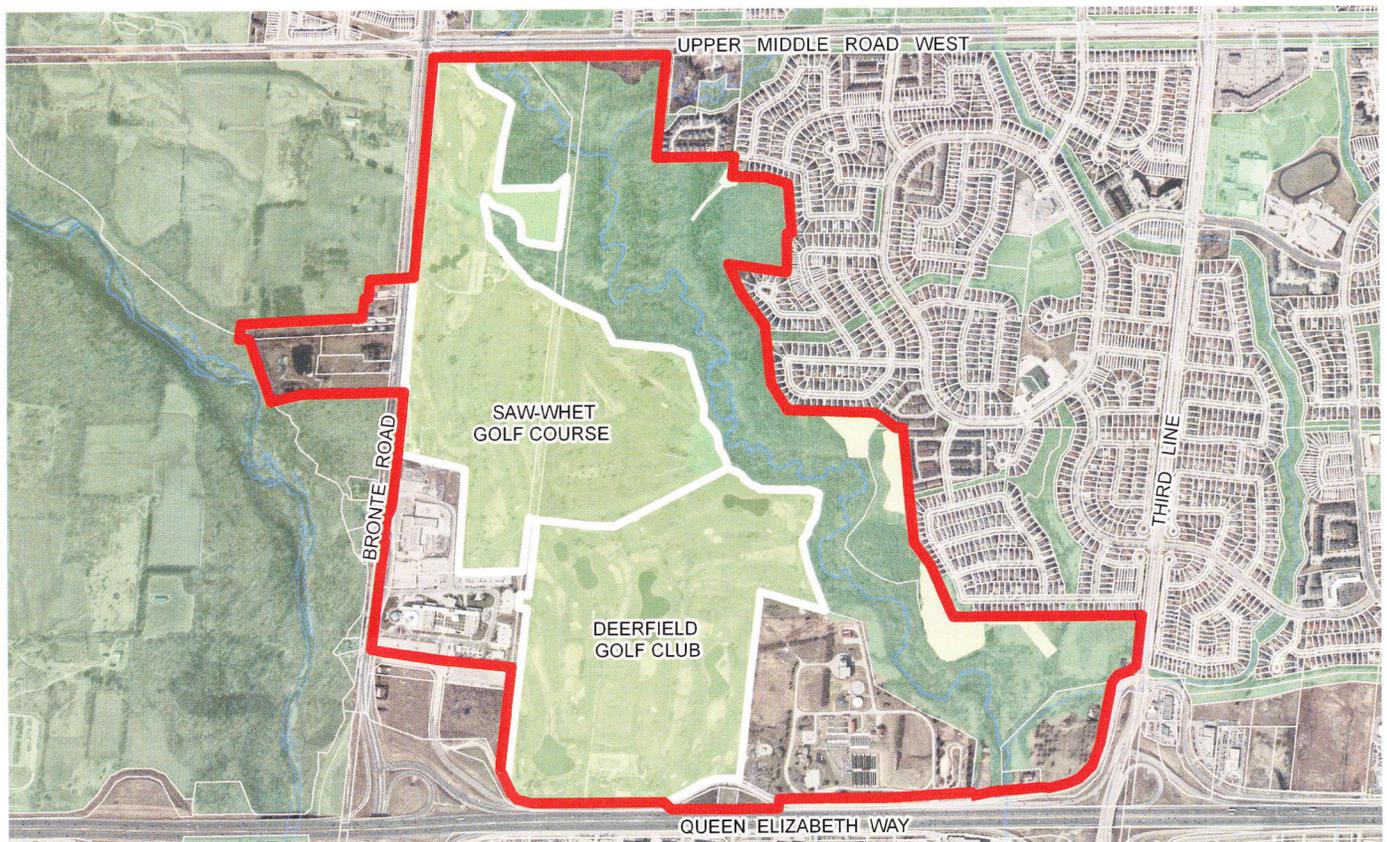
They voted against the plan to study these lands for development for many reasons including the following:

- The entire process seems premature – our provincially mandated growth targets have been met until the year 2031. The focus should be on implementing our existing growth plan before considering additional growth

- This plan contradicts the town's goal to control growth
- Deerfield Golf Course sits on land owned by the province (taxpayer), and is being leased for use until 2022. Taxpayers have not indicated they want it sold and developed
- Developers are financing environmental studies that could be used to determine the fate of their lands
- A portion of this land lies in the Parkway Belt which was protected by the Province in 1978 for passive recreational uses. Isn't this designation needed more today than ever?
- Creative, forward thinking options for this land should be thoroughly explored. Oakville residents deserve better than just more of the same

The Precautionary Principle is one of the town's guiding principles in its Environmental Strategic Plan. Perhaps retired mayor, Harry Barrett, summed it up best when he said, "We can sell off our natural assets for a quick buck and when that is done we are left flat-footed and with nothing."

The Town of Oakville is holding a public hearing on this issue in April. Be sure to make your opinions heard. Please email Councillor Elgar and Councillor Lapworth to be added to their distribution lists to receive more information about this important issue.



RESIDENTS SPEAK FOR NATURE ON MERTON LANDS

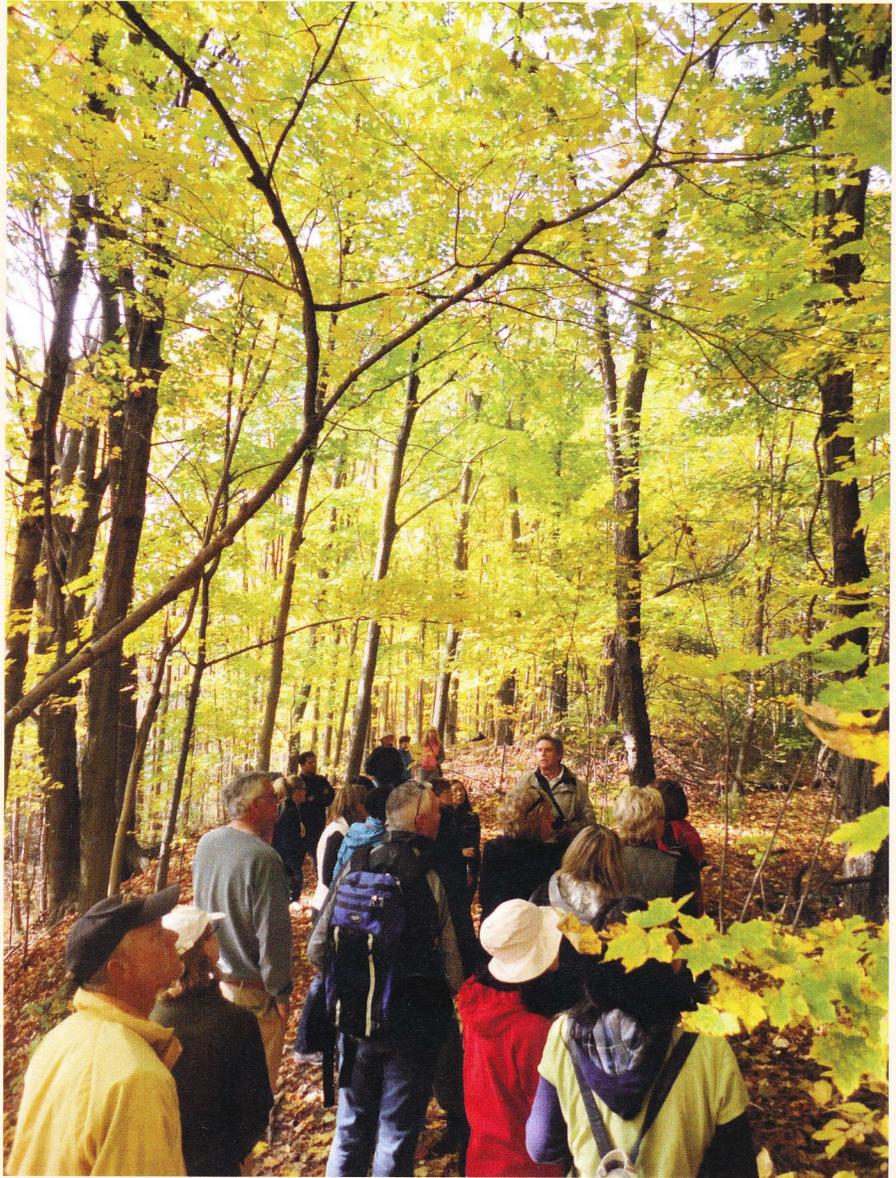
The Fourteen Mile Creek Residents' Association was created in response to the threat of development on the Merton Lands and boasts over 400 members. Together with Oakvillegreen Conservation Association, local experts and area residents have all raised concerns over development here.

These concerns include the need for the town to recognize the rights of the 'wildlife residents' who have been living, breeding, raising families or migrating through the area for generations. The Halton Natural Areas Inventory has documented a wide variety of plant, mammal, butterfly, bird and fish species, both common and rare. They include the endangered Redside Dace whose creek habitat has already been negatively impacted by numerous construction projects to the north, including the development of Richview Golf Course and the widening of Upper Middle Road.

Another example of habitat destruction occurred on the Saw Whet Golf Course, named for the little Saw Whet Owl with the big appetite for mice that hunted in the meadowlands there. Sadly, that very meadow was recently ploughed under, destroying the ecosystem even though it was located in an Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA) and should have been protected.

The Saw-whet Golf Course also serves as an important wildlife corridor connecting Bronte Creek and the Fourteen Mile Creek ESAs. Residents have asked for this area to be protected from development in order to avoid additional negative impacts on the wildlife and birdlife who traverse the area and call it home.

Dr. Pedro Pereyra, a local teacher and scientist who has studied the area extensively, noted that Deerfield and Saw-Whet Golf Courses have been in existence for so long that in essence they have become part of the ESA because so many species depend on these open spaces as part of their habitat and food and water supply. The whole area is part of the migratory corridor and wintering area for not only owls, but also other birds. The presence of several turtle species indicates that adequate or appropriate egg laying sites must be present in relative proximity to the ponds.



Dr. Pedro Pereyra, local high school teacher and scientist, leads a nature walk through Fourteen Mile Creek Environmentally Sensitive Area.

Among the concerns raised by Oakvillegreen, was the effect that developing the golf courses could have on the amount of permeable ground surface left to absorb rainfall and the potential for flooding downstream.

The Town is still accepting comments from the public. Make sure your voice is heard on this important issue.