

**OPERA REMARKS
To
GREENBELT WORKSHOP AT BURLINGTON**

NOVEMBER 16,2004

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Bob Fowler. I'm the Secretary of the Ontario Property and Environmental Rights Alliance, OPERA in shorthand, a provincial coalition of landowner organizations and trade associations. The OPERA mandate is "to protect, and entrench in law, the rights and responsibilities of private landowners against arbitrary restrictions and decisions of government". Please note this mission statement reflects a balance between rights and responsibilities not often seen in the title, much less in the activities, of militant lobby groups dedicated to state confiscation of private property by regulation without compensation.

Since its 1994 inception, OPERA has appeared at countless land use tribunals, consultations, studies, workshops and hearings convened by various agencies of senior government. In our experience, such gatherings are often initiated and conducted under 5 common denominators –

(1) they're usually dominated by civil servants, professional lobby groups and government facilitators all skilled in manufacturing so-called consensus (2) they're advertised as open consultations but many require participant registration in advance (3) they're later cited as demonstrating public knowledge and support for government legislation already enacted or in process (4) they're designed around a narrow agenda that allows little time or opportunity for specific answers to critical questions (5) they're never followed by publication of contrary views, unfavourable responses or cost/benefit queries that arise at such proceedings.

However sensible, commendable, even noble, provincial legislation is represented to be at these meetings, the Regulations that define its later implementation and enforcement are never introduced there. Instead, an army of unaccountable bureaucrats, land use planners, verbose lawyers, well paid consultants and graduate wordsmiths labour for months, even years, afterwards to produce reams of convoluted restrictions and prohibitions by which the lives and property of private landowners shall henceforth be officially encumbered.

These pervasive dictums are quietly installed as statutory law long after the charade of public meetings is concluded and public attention diverted elsewhere. And they invariably provide for draconian penalties and extortions, many based on guilt being publicly assigned until innocence is proven by the accused at his or her own vast expense. So much for democracy, common law and natural justice.

Paraphrasing Abraham Lincoln, it's our opinion that "Queen's Park will little note nor long remember what critics of its Greenbelt land scam SAY at public meetings and Workshops". That being the case, OPERA has no further comment this evening. However, our coalition has prepared and will provide by registered mail to the Minister of Municipal Affairs a written submission listing those issues and suggested amendments that reflect legitimate concerns of private landowners directly affected by Greenbelt legislation.

That submission, countersigned by OPERA support groups, will be Internet posted later this month at www.bmts.com/~opera/ . In the interim, it will be widely circulated in hard copy across Ontario. To ensure the Minister is fully aware that self-anointed stake-holders without personal investment or legal title in Greenbelt property are NOT – repeat NOT - the priority voices in this debate, such distribution will reach both the rural and urban media, a number of municipalities and all OPERA member organizations. The latter constituency, we're happy to report, includes a number of Ontario landowner associations that last year organized a rural revolution under the banner "This Land Is Our Land – Back Off Government". The smoldering tension between rural citizens and central government bureaucrats determined to encumber and embezzle private property is nowhere better expressed than in that defiant slogan. Small wonder it's clear message is daily growing in velocity and strength throughout Ontario and, indeed, across Canada.

Thanks for listening