

# Some developers win big after province expands urban boundary

Farm outside Orléans was purchased for \$12.7M before most recent expansion



[Kate Porter](#) · CBC News · Posted: Nov 24, 2022 4:00 AM ET | Last Updated: November 24



A 37-hectare farm, which is zoned as an agricultural resource just beyond the suburb of Orléans, has been allowed inside the City of Ottawa's urban boundary by Ontario's Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. (Kate Porter/CBC)

Of all the land around Ottawa's suburban edges that Ontario's housing minister unilaterally designated for development earlier this month, one 37-hectare farm arguably came as the biggest surprise.

The east-end farm is a small part of the 654-hectare urban expansion [Steve Clark imposed Nov. 4](#) when he overrode [a hotly debated 2020 city decision](#) — one of many recent controversial steps the Progressive Conservative government has taken to boost housing supply.

- [The Ford government has expanded Ottawa's boundary. Here's what's been added](#)

Unlike other lands the province [tapped for future suburbs](#), and beyond the 1,281 hectares council itself had approved, the farm on Watters Road wasn't even contemplated for development [during lengthy debates in 2021](#) because Ontario's own planning policies call for good farmland to be protected.

The rural scene on that dead-end dirt road is peaceful, with snowy corn stalks standing rigid in a field near an old barn. The pine trees that line nearby Cardinal Creek disguise the rows of suburban homes just half a kilometre up the hill in Orléans.

The property's foreseeable lack of development potential seemed plain enough when city council took [an official stance to not allow houses on farmland](#) and marked out the urban [expansion line in February 2021](#), leaving out that particular parcel.

Yet records show that in August 2021, the newly incorporated 1177 Watters Developments Ltd. bought it for \$12.7 million — which equates to \$139,382 an acre — from the family that had long owned it.

According to corporate records, all five directors are with the Verdi Alliance group of concrete companies. The five men donated a combined \$12,315 to the Progressive Conservatives in 2021 and 2022.

CBC News tried to reach the directors but got no response.

Questions to Clark's office about the farm, any perception of a conflict of interest, and lobbying by developers connected to other parcels he added to the urban boundary also went unanswered.

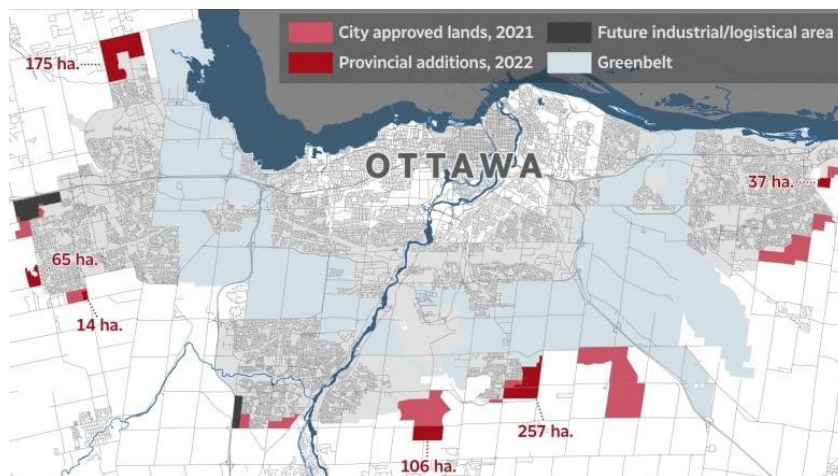
## **129 hectares of farmland disappear daily**

Meanwhile in the Greater Toronto Area, the province is facing criticism for proposing to open up its Greenbelt for housing, including repealing a law that protects some 2,000 hectares of agricultural land near Pickering, Ont.

- [The Ford government wants to open up the GTA's Greenbelt for housing](#)
- [Wealthy Ontario developer close to winning battle, building on protected Greenbelt](#)

The government is "taking steps backward" and choosing new housing over future food security when it should be able to have both, according to Emily Sousa, a farm policy analyst at the Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA).

The current policy guiding land use orders cities and towns to build efficiently near transit and infrastructure and avoid urbanizing farmland. But the province doesn't seem to be following its own rules or [listening to the OFA or municipalities](#), said Sousa.



(Neil Joyes/CBC)

Sousa points out that Ontario is losing [129 hectares of farmland each day](#), according to Statistics Canada's [latest census of agriculture](#).

Not only is it disappearing at an increasing rate, but farming itself becomes harder as urban sprawl edges outward and farm equipment mixes with traffic on country roads, she said.

- **ANALYSIS | [Ford government's Bill 39 is 'against the basic democratic instinct'](#)**
- [4 ways the PC government's new housing bill could override city powers](#)

"It's worrisome on so many different levels," said Sousa.

"What is scary about the rate of farmland loss, and these seemingly small decisions to bring [in] a small bit of land here and a little bit of land there, is the cumulative impact that has over time."



**Ottawa Morning**10:17These lands are being snapped up amid 'scary' urban boundary expansion

The parcels of rural land that Ontario's housing minister has allowed inside Ottawa's urban boundary include a farm that was supposed to be protected from development, yet was purchased for \$12.7 million in 2021 by PC party donors.

## **\$40M in land purchases at Findlay Creek**

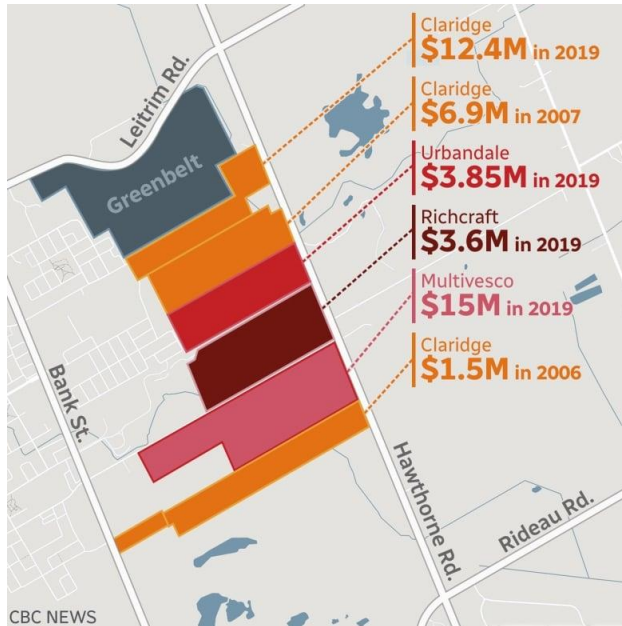
Land speculation is nothing new.

Buyers have always snapped up rural land on city peripheries years or decades in advance, expecting that some day neighbourhoods will stretch out and once-rural lands [will spike in value](#).

Nor is it unexpected that landowners will argue to get their properties inside the urban boundary. At public committee meetings in 2020 and 2021, owners [made their pitches to Ottawa city councillors](#) and — as a provincial registry shows — hired lobbying firms to talk to the minister himself.

To find some of the biggest winners of Clark's decision, one has to follow Bank Street south until it hits the countryside and the booming suburban neighbourhood of Findlay Creek.

Well-known local developers like Claridge Homes, Urbandale, Richcraft, and Multivesco, along with local golf club owner Patterson Group, asked a joint committee in January 2021 to let them "complete" the Findlay Creek area all the way west to Hawthorne Road.



Most of the 257 hectares added by the province for future development in the Findlay Creek area were bought up by established local developers in 2019. City staff deemed the southernmost area too close to an active quarry to even consider for urban expansion. (Neil Joyes/CBC)

Property records show that while Claridge purchased some parcels as far back as 2006, those four developers bought more than half the land in 2019 alone. Together they've paid more than \$40 million.

But that land initially failed [to make it inside the boundary](#).

City staff scored those parcels poorly, saying transit and water infrastructure would be costly. Plus, the southernmost Claridge parcel was too close to an active quarry.

Despite that, the Ontario housing minister this month allowed an extra 257 hectares inside the urban boundary.

Some of those same developers also spent tens of millions buying 175 hectares north of Kanata in the South March area, which were also let inside the boundary.

Companies Claridge, Multivesco, eQ Homes, Uniform Developments, and Minto released a statement when the city committee swapped their land out in

favour of Tewin in 2021, despite their lands scoring well with staff. Now, all are back in.

They declined to comment for this story.

## Suburban growth exploding

The divide between city and country can be stark.

Where Bank Street meets the countryside in Findlay Creek, for instance, townhomes still clad in white house wrap sit mid-construction as a barn falls into disrepair behind them.



Townhomes are constructed in November 2022 in the Findlay Creek neighbourhood, at the edge of Ottawa's urban boundary, where once rural lands have just been added for future development. (Kate Porter/CBC)

The area has exploded, said Mariam Zeitoun, who's lived there for a dozen years — and she's not wrong.

The City of Ottawa's annual report on development shows the population in the Findlay Creek area grew by 6,754 over five years to 16,038 people in 2021.

It added more people [than live in Perth, Ont.](#), and is a few hundred people short of the [population of Pembroke, Ont.](#)

Residents say the community is family-friendly, but they also note the elementary school's yard is filled with portable classrooms and that traffic on both Bank Street

and Albion Road is getting worse. The area doesn't have its own community centre, library, or recreation centre.



Zeitoun says the Findlay Creek area has grown dramatically since she moved in a dozen years ago. Before more development can come, she says the area needs schools, better roads, a community centre and public transit. (Kate Porter/CBC)

The newly added Findlay Creek lands are nearly five kilometres from the future Leitrim LRT station. Zeitoun says the area needs more transit — she has to drive her oldest children to jobs and university.

"How many more people are we going to add? It's insane. It makes no sense how it's going to ... help the community that's already here," said Zeitoun.

"It seems it's more about profit than anything else."