



A Shared Vision for the Expanded Rouge National Urban Park

September 2024
Revised January 2026

Executive Summary

Recommendations

1. Transfer all government-owned lands in the Pickering Federal Land holdings to Parks Canada for the expansion of the Rouge National Urban Park to ensure their protection and management under Parks Canada's mandate. Any lands within the Park designated as urban settlement should remain under Park Canada's oversight and protection, and be managed through a community-driven land trust model.
2. Parks Canada to undertake a public process and Indigenous and First Nations consultations to refine the vision for the future of the Pickering Federal Lands within the expanded Rouge National Urban Park.
3. Increase funding to Parks Canada to implement the expansion and manage the expanded RNUP.

Background

In 1972, the Canadian government expropriated 18,600 acres (7,527 hectares) of land in North Pickering for an international airport that was never built. Over the 50 years that the project has been on hold, the lands have not been used to their maximum economic potential, while surrounding communities and ecosystems face significant pressures for urbanization. This presents an extraordinary opportunity to integrate these lands into the Rouge National Urban Park (RNUP), Canada's premier urban park. Currently, these lands contain a diverse mosaic of ecosystems, including the Duffins Creek watershed and some of Canada's best agricultural land.

Opportunity

If the threat of the airport on the Pickering Federal Lands is removed it opens a unique one time opportunity to leverage this vast area incorporating these lands into the expanded RNUP. This would allow for the creation of a world-class model of coexistence between nature, farming, and rural communities simultaneously addressing: environmental conservation, agricultural sustainability, and rural revitalization. Such integration could be one of the last large-scale land transfers in southern Ontario, bringing multiple benefits to the region while safeguarding the area's ecological and agricultural value.

The ecosystem services that nature provides are our 'natural capital'. Without their irreplaceable functions such as pollination, climate regulation, soil health, and water filtration, we will be jeopardising our future food security and there will be no negotiation in the world that will bring that back.

Vision

At the heart of this vision is the preservation of prime Class 1 farmland, which is among the most fertile in Canada, alongside natural ecosystems that support a rich variety of flora and fauna, protecting these resources while enhancing them through sustainable farming practices, agritourism, and community revitalization. This vision builds on the area's historical significance, including farming legacies and heritage structures, while looking toward future sustainability.

By bringing together these elements, the expanded park will serve as a demonstration of how environmental and agricultural goals can align for mutual benefit.

The expanded RNUP will serve one of Canada's most densely populated urban regions, providing essential green space for millions of residents. It would allow urban dwellers to engage with nature, learn about the region's natural and cultural heritage, and participate in outdoor recreation. Additionally, it will create opportunities for agritourism and agri-businesses, boosting local economies and providing sustainable livelihoods for farmers and entrepreneurs.

This expansion also strengthens the ecological connection between the Oak Ridges Moraine and Lake Ontario, two critical natural features in the Greater Golden Horseshoe. By maintaining an intact ecological corridor, wildlife will continue to move freely, ensuring the long-term health of ecosystems across the region.

Action

The primary goal is to transfer ownership of the Pickering Federal Lands from Transport Canada to Parks Canada. This transfer will secure the area's natural and agricultural heritage and foster community revitalization. By integrating the lands into RNUP, this initiative will also contribute to Canada's broader environmental goals, such as conserving 30% of the country's land and waters by 2030 as part of its Global Biodiversity commitments.

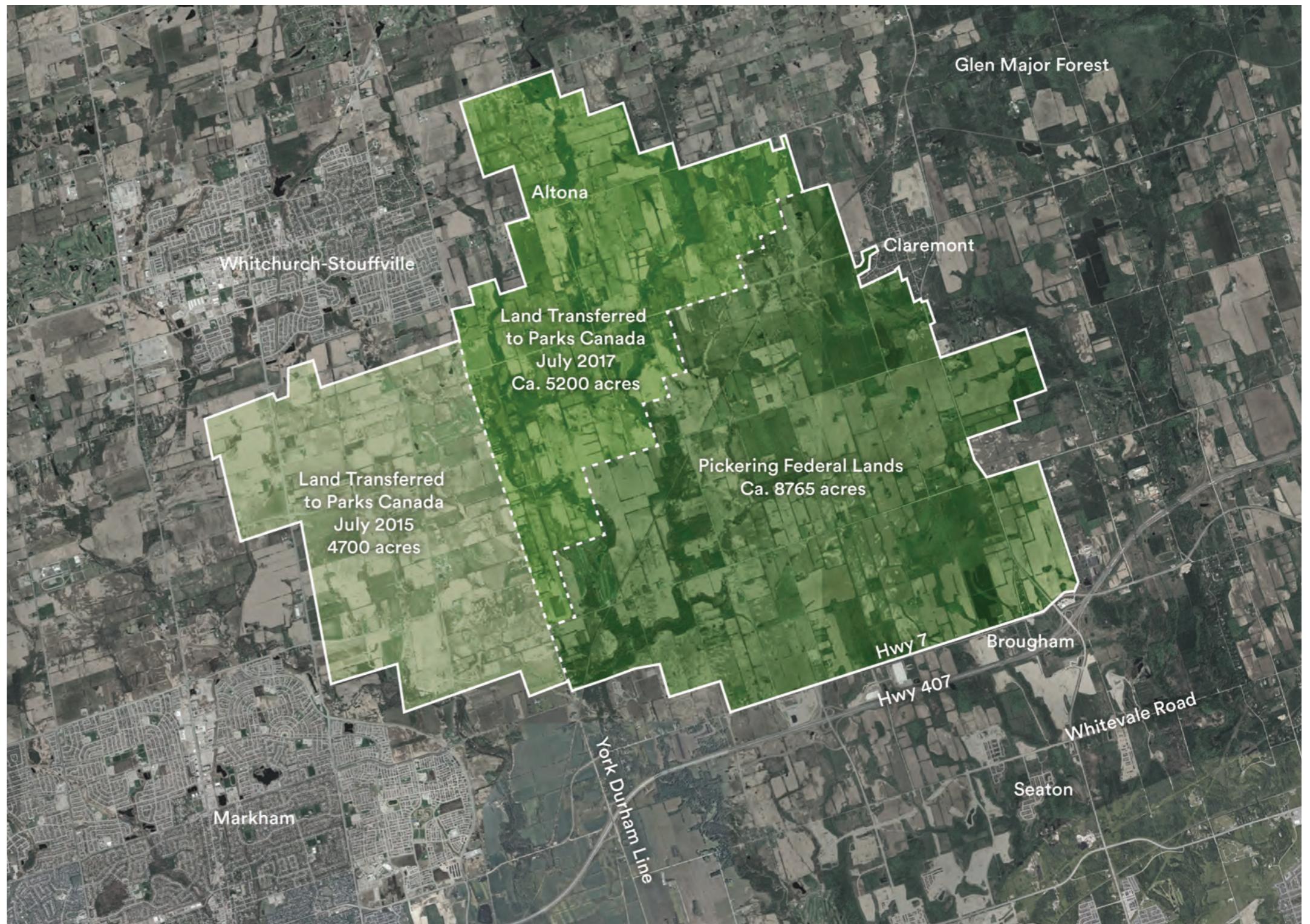
A Community-Driven Land Trust for the Pickering Federal Lands would ensure that publicly owned lands are held in perpetual public stewardship, managed for community benefit rather than private speculation. By empowering local residents, public partners, and civic organizations to guide development, the trust would restore Brougham in the Federal Lands, and Altona in the existing Rouge National Urban Park, as vibrant, mixed-use hamlets that embody social inclusion, ecological regeneration, and long-term public accountability.

In conclusion, this Shared Vision for the Expanded Rouge National Urban Park incorporating the Pickering Federal Lands into RNUP represents an unparalleled opportunity to address some of the region's most pressing environmental, agricultural, and community challenges. By demonstrating how nature, farming, and rural communities can thrive together, this expansion offers a forward-thinking solution for the 21st century.

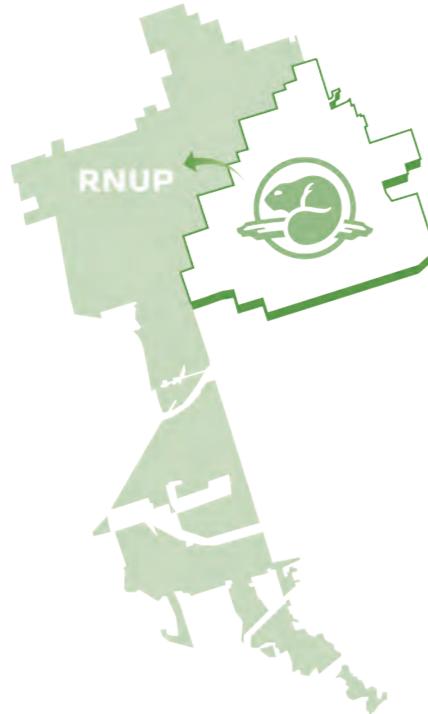
Rouge National Urban Park and Ontario Greenbelt



Site Boundary



Ten Guiding Principles



1. Land Transfer

- All Pickering Federal Lands are transferred to the Rouge National Urban Park (RNUP) under Parks Canada's mandate and management.
- Parks Canada needs to be adequately resourced to effect and manage the expansion.

2. First Nation Inclusion

- Parks Canada has partnerships in place and an established framework in the RNUP that includes First Nations in its management, through the creation of the Rouge National Urban Park First Nations Advisory Circle, comprised of representatives from 10 First Nations with an expressed interest, historic and cultural connection to the national urban park area.



3. Enhance the Rouge National Urban Park

- Contribute to the viability and functionality of the Rouge National Urban Park
- Protect additional natural systems and ecology including their strategic natural setting within the Duffins Creek watershed, its forested areas, streams, vegetation and topography.
- Promote the expanded Rouge National Urban Park as a place of natural refuge while also encouraging recreation and educating users of the mental and physical health benefits of spending time outdoors.
- Promote understanding of the common interest in natural and cultural stewardship, both historical and present.



4. Preserve Class 1 farmland

- Acknowledge the vital role of agriculture as a key part of the local economy.
- Enhance the unique contribution the lands can make to provide opportunities for intensive mixed farming for local food production and increased food security.
- Support a new generation of farmers seeking to engage in farming.

Ten Guiding Principles



5. Restore Community

- Accommodate and house the local community including those working in farming and related enterprises.
- Utilize existing brownfields including the opportunity for the revitalized hamlet of Brougham.
- Seek selective new opportunities to restore a community presence within the Park related to the farming activity and within controlled limits conditioned by the unique natural setting.
- Showcase solutions for rural revitalization applicable to other rural municipalities.

6. Co-existence of mutually supporting uses

- Preservation of the unique natural setting while providing a regional natural, agricultural and cultural resource and contributing to the local economy.
- Combine the three principal elements in the Park: nature, farming and community in mutually supportive relationships.
- Leverage the value of this combination striking the right balance so that each use is viable and the sum of the parts is greater than the whole.



7. Foster inclusion

- Provide a welcoming and inclusive place where Canadians of all backgrounds can explore and connect with the natural world and each other.
- Provide visitor experiences and access to nature inspiring residents and visitors to explore the rural landscape and learn more about the region's natural heritage, including the Greenbelt.
- Enable a new population to engage in productive agriculture serving the region.

Ten Guiding Principles



8. Accessibility

- Enable visitors to explore the expanded Rouge National Urban Park in a variety of ways that promote responsible stewardship of the natural and cultural environment.
- Provide an example of sustainable mobility and access to and within the Park.
- Provide safe access, incorporate, formalize, and leverage existing trail linkages between public landholdings identified in the TRCA Trail Strategy for the Greater Toronto Region including but not limited to the Oak Ridges Moraine Trail, the Greenbelt Route, the Great Lakes Waterfront Trail and the Trans Canada Trail and local networks.



9. Quality of Place

- Enhance the experience of place.
- Provide welcoming places to gather, meet and share and appreciate the unique qualities of the Park while resting lightly on the land.
- Promote high standards of design excellence in the Park landscape interventions, and community structures and infrastructure.



10. A sustainable model

- Advocate for adequate funding and resources to support Parks Canada's work to implement the expansion and the vision.
- Enhance the long-term resiliency of a dynamic and growing urban region.
- Preserve an enlarged green reserve within the larger urban area that contributes to carbon sequestration, flood protection and climate tempering.
- Employ best practices to promote climate readiness in all operations within the Park.
- Work with Parks Canada as they undertake a public process to refine the vision for the future of the Pickering Federal Lands within the expanded Rouge National Urban Park.

The Three-Legged Stool Vision



- Develop sustainable hamlets
- Promote interaction with nature and food production
 - Create educational facilities
 - Implement renewable energy system
- Restore nature system
 - Establish connected ecological corridors
 - Enhance biodiversity
 - Protect habitat and ecosystem
 - Protect and restore watershed integrity
- Promote sustainable agriculture
 - Security of Tenure
 - Integrate food production with community engagement
 - Agri-tourism

From Lake Ontario to Oak Ridges Moraine



Nature Protection Strategy

 *Biodiversity Corridor - 100m offset*



 *Agroforestry - 200m offset*



 *Existing Woodlands and Hedgerow Connection*



Nature Vision Plan



Farming Vision Plan



Two Complementary Developments



1. Revitalized Brougham

■ Existing building / road

■ New construction

■ Community programs

Surface area: 100 ac



2. Revitalized Altona

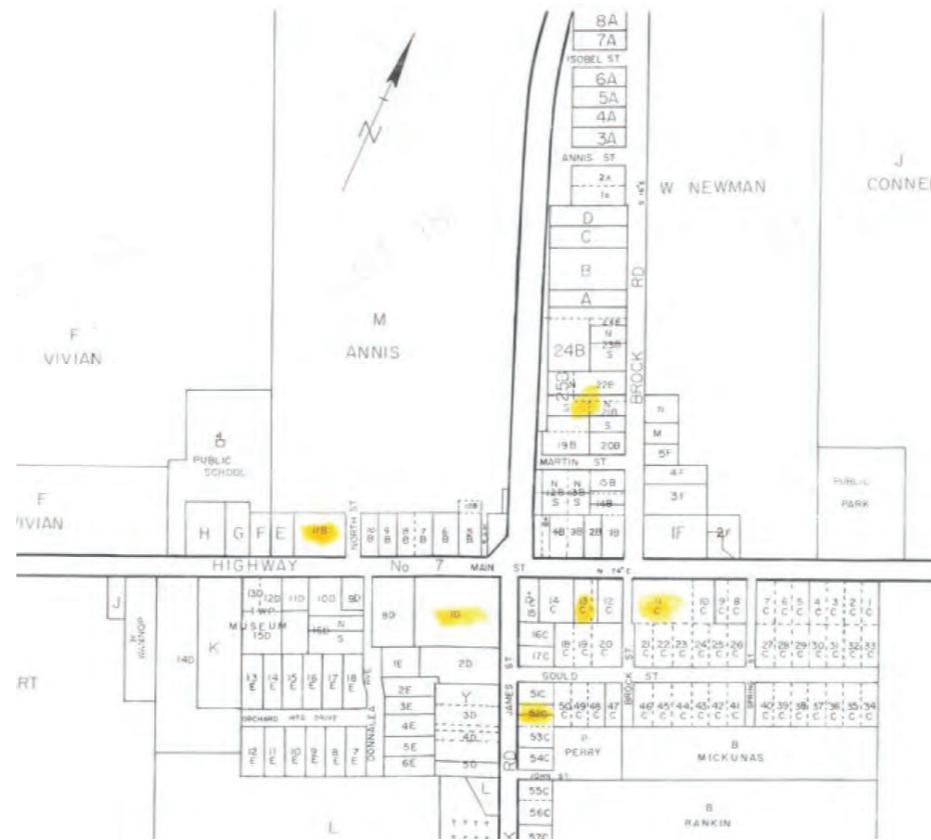
■ Existing building / road

■ New construction

■ Community programs

Surface area: 100 ac

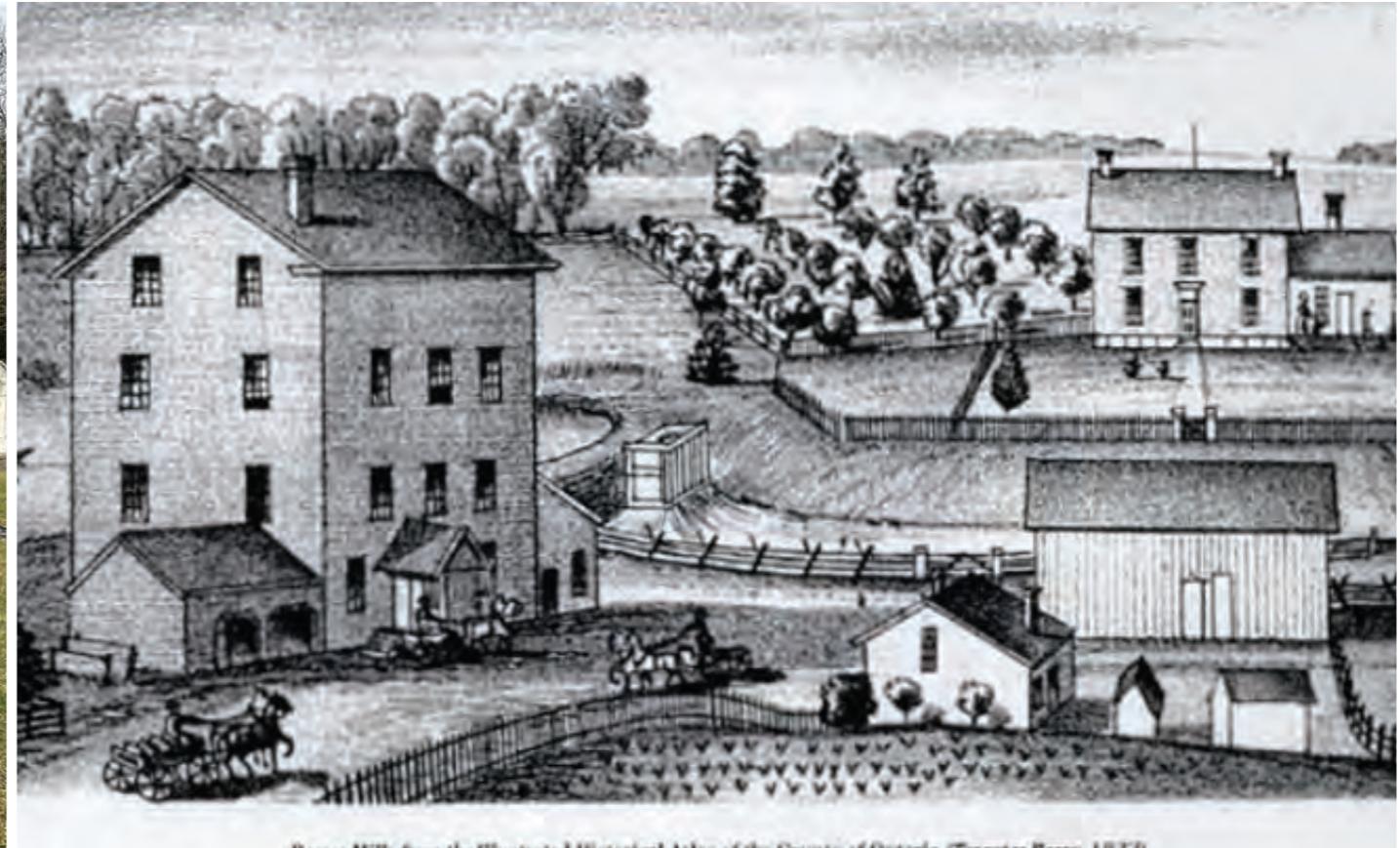
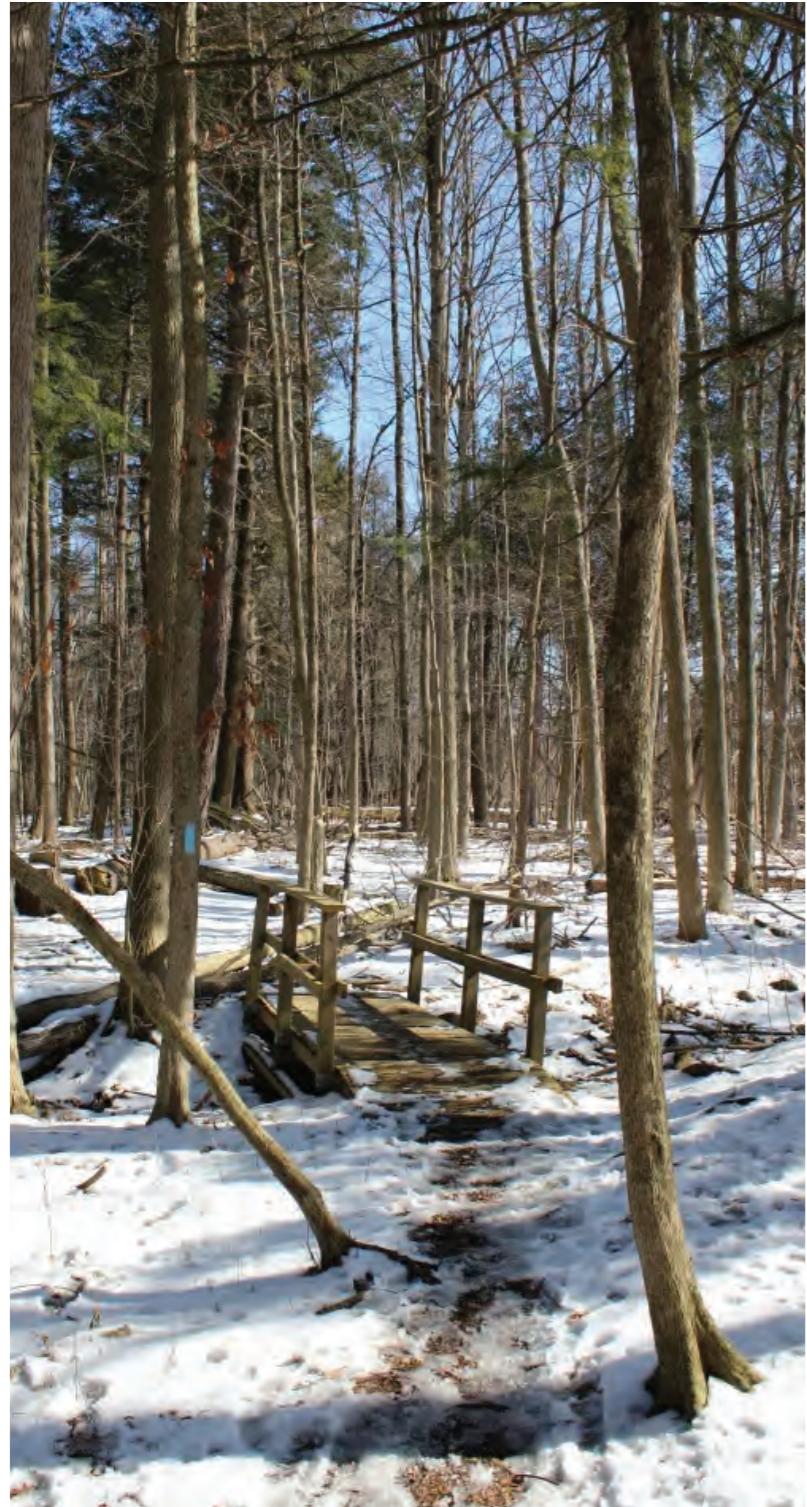
The Hamlet of Brougham



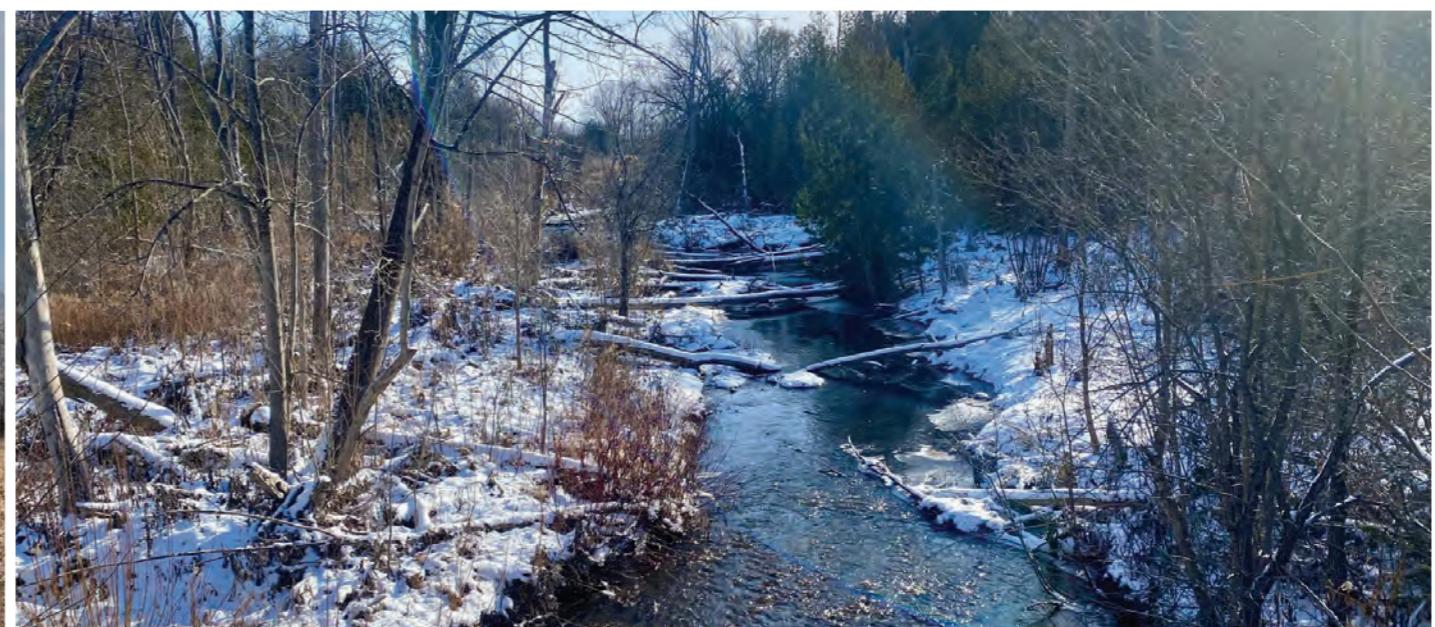
Brougham School c. 1890.
Now part of Pickering Township Museum, Brougham, Ontario.



The Hamlet of Altona



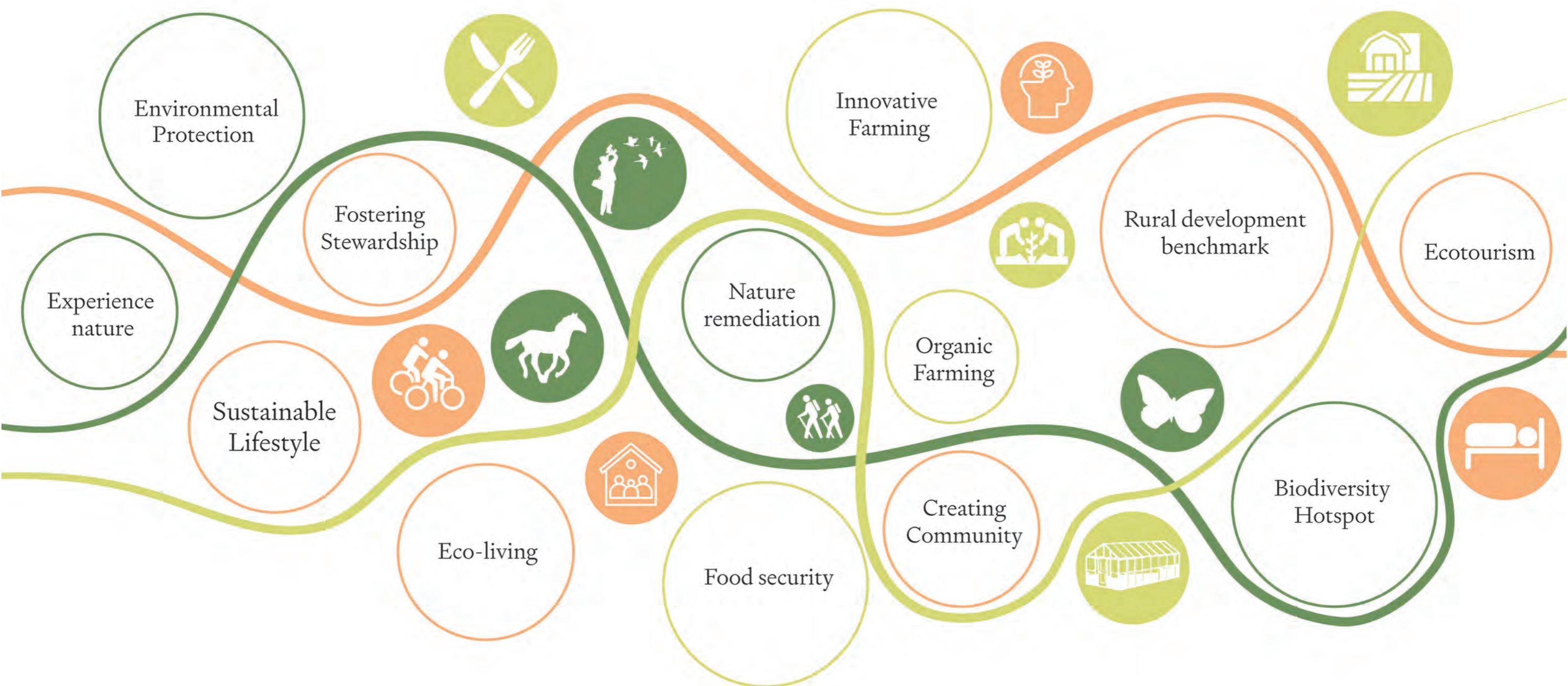
Reeser Mills from the Illustrated Historical Atlas of the County of Ontario (Toronto: Beers, 1877).



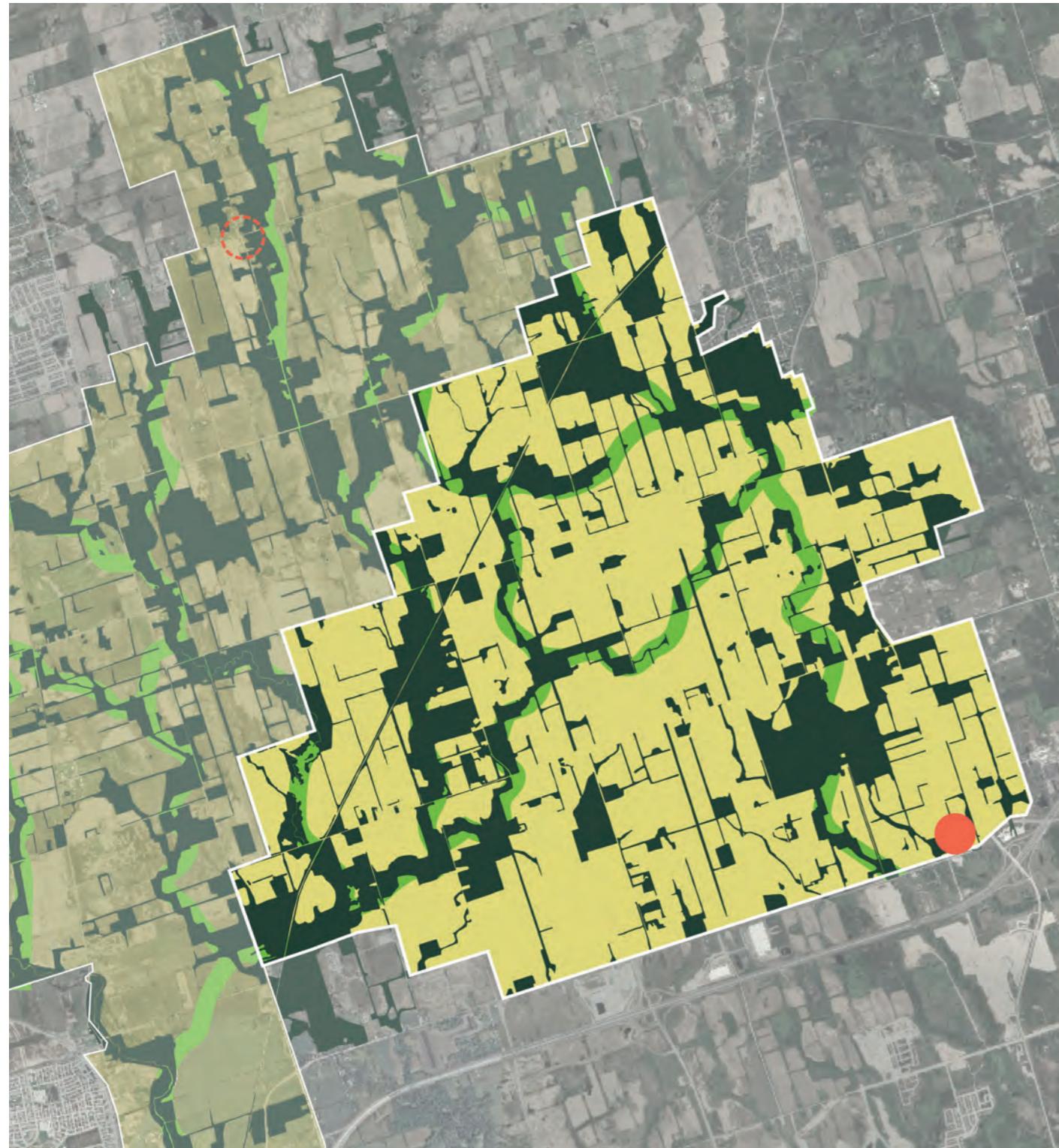
Overlap the Three Legs



Integration Strategies



Statistics



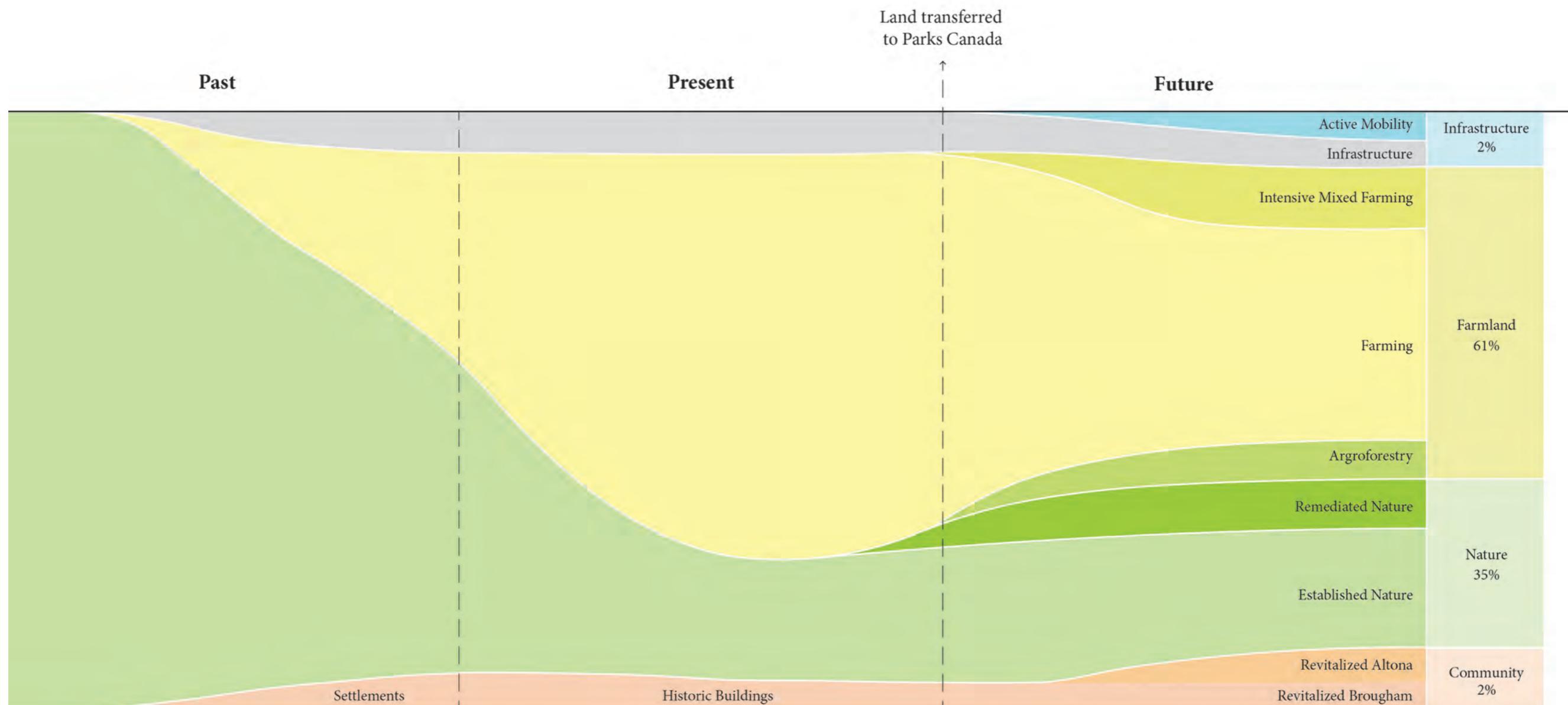
Current Situation

Remaining Airport Site:	8700 acres	100%
Existing farmland:	ca. 6090 acres	70%
Existing nature area:	ca. 2610 acres	30%
Existing infrastructure:	ca. 100 acres	1%

New Vision Plan

Site Area:	8700 acres	100%
Revitalized Brougham:	ca. 100 acres	1%
Revitalized Altona (in existing RNUP):	ca. 100 acres	n/a
Retained Nature Area:	ca. 2610 acres	30%
Proposed Extended Nature Area:	ca. 500 acres	5%
Optimized Farmland:	ca. 5394 acres	62%
Optimized Infrastructure:	TBD	TBD

Statistics



From mono-culture to diverse and sustainable development

