

# WELLINGTON ADVERTISER

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Feat of strength – 2022 U.S. and World Champion John Van Beuren tosses a 56-pound stone during the World Heavy Events Championship at the Fergus Scottish Festival and Highland Games last weekend. More festival coverage on pages 17 and 38. Photo by Ryan Joyce

## Five cattle perish in barn fire

Advertiser staff

MINTO – Five cattle were killed as fire destroyed a barn southeast of Clifford on Saturday night.

Around 7:30pm on Aug. 14, Minto Fire's Clifford Station responded to report of a barn on fire at a rural property on Ayton Road near Wellington Road 2.

Minto Fire officials state smoke and flames were coming from the structure as firefighters arrived.

Everyone in the building “got out safely and no injuries were reported,” a press release states.

However, five cattle perished in the fire. Fire officials did not provide information about the cause of the fire, but noted it was accidental.

The blaze resulted in an estimated \$750,000 in damage.

Approximately 50 firefighters from stations in Palmerston, Harriston, Wellington North and West Grey responded.

“Minto Fire wishes to thank our neighbours in Wellington North and West Grey for the support,” the release states.

See photo on page 6.

## Greenbelt land swap audit: ‘preferential treatment’ given to developers

Government implementing 14 of 15 audit recommendations; additional investigation by integrity commissioner, police possible

By Jordan Snobelen

TORONTO – The provincial government’s hasty move to open thousands of acres of Greenbelt-designated land for housing development was “flawed” and “biased,” Ontario’s Auditor General told reporters on Aug. 9.

Not only was the redesignation of 7,400 acres by the Progressive Conservatives unnecessary to meet its lofty goal of seeing 1.5 million homes built by 2031, the government missed the mark on other details, such as environmental considerations and Indigenous consultation.

A new and damning report from Ontario Auditor General Bonnie Lysyk laid bare the revelations last week.

The province, led by Premier Doug Ford, “failed to consider environmental, agricultural and financial risks and impacts, proceeded

with little input from experts or affected parties, and favoured certain developers/landowners,” Lysyk said.

The 95-page report, tabled in the Ontario Legislature, began after provincial opposition party leaders wrote to Lysyk calling for an investigation in January.

“While the people of Ontario deserve prompt action to solve societal problems like those generated by a need for housing, this does not mean that government and non-elected political staff should sideline or abandon protocols and processes that are important to guide objective and transparent decision-making based on sufficient and accurate information,” Lysyk said.

Speaking to reporters the day the report was released, the premier admitted there are “areas for improvement.”

“We were moving fast ... We could of had a better process,” the

premier told reporters at Queen’s Park on Aug. 9.

“I take full responsibility for the need for better process.”

Of 15 recommendations put forward by the auditor general, the government will implement nearly all, with the exception of one calling on the government to reevaluate its Greenbelt decisions.

Doubling down last week, Ford said, “We can build more homes, or we can sit back and let the crisis get worse; our government is choosing to build.”

If there was any ambiguity, he followed up his statement saying, “our government will proceed with these developments.”

The premier claimed opening up Greenbelt land for development will allow for at least 50,000 new homes for at least 150,000 people — many of them immigrants anticipated to settle in Ontario.

“As we continue to respond to

the housing supply and affordability crisis, we need to keep moving,” Ford said, adding the problem would only be solved by balancing out supply and demand.

### Audit reveals flawed reasoning, process

But Lysyk said “the reasoning for the Greenbelt changes was just as flawed as the selection process itself.”

The audit revealed a restricted process excluding substantive input from many stakeholders, including other provincial ministries as well as the municipalities affected — a point local planners have made in speaking with the *Advertiser*.

“Nor did the housing ministry carry out a comprehensive analysis of the 35,000 comments posted on the registry which were overwhelming negative,” Lysyk said.

“Preferential treatment” was given to developers with “direct access” to the housing minister’s

chief of staff Ryan Amato, an audit report states.

Since the Greenbelt — the world’s largest — was established by the Dalton McGuinty Liberal government 18 years ago, hundreds of requests for land removal have been submitted.

But just 22 were considered for removal last year, the audit notes.

Of those, 21 were put forward by the housing minister’s chief of staff, who led a six-person group of apolitical staff on the “Greenbelt Project Team” tasked with identifying and selecting lands for removal, the audit revealed.

Last December, the government approved 15 areas to be removed from regions in Durham, Hamilton and York — 14 were recommended by Amato, with just one recommended by Greenbelt Project Team staff.

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## Bail denied for Mount Forest man accused of arson in multiple fires

By Jordan Snobelen

GUELPH – Justice of the Peace Walter Rojek wasn’t convinced a 21-year-old Mount Forest man wouldn’t reoffend if granted bail and released back into the community.

Nor was he confident the man’s mother could adequately serve as a surety, which is someone who promises they’ll be responsible for a person on bail.

Appearing virtually for a bail hearing before Guelph court on

Aug. 10, Tracy Grant said she would ensure her son, Chester Lewis, would follow “the rules of the court” and ensure he attends future court dates.

Although courts typically impose a publication ban at the request of the defence or an accused person, severely limiting what journalists can report about bail hearings, one was never requested, nor did the court impose a ban.

Between January and July this year, police allege Lewis committed arsons, stole two vehicles, pos-

sessed stolen property, assaulted a person with a weapon, possessed prohibited weapons (including a taser and brass knuckles), and failed to comply with conditions of a previous release from custody.

None of the charges have been tested in court and Lewis remains innocent unless proven otherwise.

Having relocated to Kenilworth days before the hearing, Grant offered her home for Lewis to reside, which she told court is far enough away from Mount Forest.

She also said her son would be

kept busy working as a roofer and framer.

“[He] wouldn’t be in town and getting into any trouble, that’s for sure,” Grant testified at the reverse-onus hearing.

The onus of advocating to refuse bail and keep someone locked up typically falls to the Crown.

But in some hearings, such as this, the burden falls on the accused and defence counsel to persuade the court for a release from custody.

Despite being on a fixed Ontario Disability Support Program

income, Grant also told the court she was willing to put \$1,000 on the line, which could be owed to the court if bail conditions weren’t followed.

Throughout the hour-long hearing on Thursday, which took place after several delays, Grant testified about her plan to look after Lewis if bail were granted.

She would give him a place to stay, advocate for professional health care help, remain in contact with a cell phone, obtain his

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