

Private Citizen Delegation

Open Letter to Burlington City Council and Staff, re: The New Official Plan.

Delegation correspondence

Yielding to intensive lobbying, delegation and protests from Citizens Groups, Local Businesses and even from Building Developers, Burlington City Council and Staff have pushed the schedule for passing their revamped "Official Plan." Back to April 2018. The original December 2017 schedule for Burlington's most important planning document for the next several decades, was being rushed in order to have the plan adopted before it could become a 2018 election issue. On Tuesday January 23, council will discuss final implementation dates for that plan.

The question now becomes: Will that final vote by council in April, on the plan that will guide city development for decades to come, still allow councillors to avoid electoral accountability in next year's election?

Those same community groups are still suspicious and are now saying very loudly that accountability for that final vote on the plan can only be served by moving the decision even farther back until a new council is elected. The New Official Plan is important enough to be a major issue in that upcoming election. Instead of rushing to avoid electoral accountability, Council and Staff should spend the time finalizing a Plan that serves our city, its people, its downtown retail, commercial and business communities.

That New Official Plan must be based on the Mobility Hub, Transit and Cycling Plans, all of which have been promised but none of which are currently completed, begging the question how do you build an overarching plan when the building block plans are not yet in place? These should all be developed with real input from all Citizen, Retail and Commercial Groups and with real engagement; not the pseudo consultation that has taken place to date, and put in place first.

The New Official Plan represents a radical change to our city. It contemplates massive increases in population, allowing hi-rises on traditional downtown retail and commercial sites with no allowance for preserving the quality of life for residents. The city would have us believe that any negative effects of the Plan will be addressed by Mobility Hub, Transit and Cycling Plans which, as previously stated, are not even in place yet.

As our city moves forward with the revised schedule for its Official Plan. We ask of our city fathers and staff.

1. Please do not close off further citizen input and delegation. The legalities of the Official Plan approval process demand citizen input. To date that input has at best been directed by staff rather than real participation by those citizens directly impacted. The best and most attention grabbing ideas so far have come from engaged and active citizens groups, small businesses even city developers and not from the Pseudo Involvement so far undertaken by the city. Let staff and council use this time and this groundswell of engagement to seek real input to improve and perfect the plan.
2. Having accepted that the timeline for the New Official Plan was indeed flawed and reacted properly by revising that timeline, we ask that the decision on the zoning amendment for 421/423 Brant Street be revisited and any revisions of that zoning be included as an integral part of the fresh review of the New Official Plan. The parallels between the two issues, Intensification in General, and Specific Downtown Zoning are so similar it seems logical to consider one as part of the other bigger issue.

3. Citizens accept that council are elected and staff employed to provide the best possible planning for our city's future. We will not always agree on what that planning may look like so we rely on two things to address our disagreements. First; the professionalism and qualification of city staff to provide guidance to council and second; the underlying accountability that our representative democracy gives us to hold our elected officials to. So we ask again: Why the rush to pass this Plan? If it truly is the basis on which our city will be built over the coming decades, and if our city fathers truly believe in the plan they have created, why not let council make this New Official Plan the core issue in the 2018 election? Why not let the people speak?

Be assured that citizen groups are paying very careful attention to this issue and council's responses to their voices. A failure to listen to your citizens now will not go unnoticed in October.

Jim Young, Burlington.