

PB-11-18  
502-02-68  
Delegation correspondence

There is a vibe that is growing about this downtown core. It is hard to describe if you don't live here. We are truly a community. Someone wrote recently said, Think of it this way; often quality of life means more than quantity of people!

When I chat with people downtown from out of town their impressions are almost always similar. Most of them tell me they love it here just the way it is and would love to live here. They always seem to comment on the cool character of Brant Street. It's not just me and my neighbours!

This past beautiful weekend was just that, a beauty. I was speaking with many people on Brant St and around the core. With local friends and neighbours you build friendships. Other people in the neighbourhood you know and chat with. Living in low rise residential neighbourhoods you create a healthy connected community...with thoughtful community based planning you can further facilitate an even healthier and vibrant precinct. The Condo experience is different. Frankly, it is more akin to the warehousing of people in towers approach to urban housing development...I lived in a tower in Toronto and you knew a few neighbours and would nod to the odd person on the elevator. And then there is the mole people in Toronto who never go beyond their building, the subways and their work tower. Yikes, what a life. If people want to live in this type of environment that is their choice and can work for many. My major concern though is that rampant, supersized condo development, fed with steroids, will seriously impair the unique community we have collectively built ( the city and the citizens together ) in today's downtown Burlington.

By contrast, smaller building height restrictions will result in less intimidating structures that are more relative in size to the existing neighbourhoods. Size does matter in this discussion. In addition, the taller the building the more challenging elevator usage can be and in the event of medical emergencies, terrible outcomes have a higher probability of occurring. It is particularly important as a health and safety issue when many of these units will be occupied by aging boomers. Joan Little's recent article in the Spectator brings this issue to life and imho should be required reading for councillors and planning staff alike.

Another item I wanted to flag for councillor review is a FB post on Sunday from grow bold advising me to get the facts. It said "Under Burlington's proposed Downtown Precinct Plan only 11% of the downtown would see growth over the next 100 years. 49% remains protected public space and 40% remains protected residential neighbourhoods". First to predict growth levels and guarantee them for 100 years leads me to believe Kreskin must have been hired on as consultant! We have already seen exemptions and exceptions to the existing plan that somehow approved a 23 storey tower across from City Hall. The other key concern I have with these percentages is that they are only talking about footprint coverage on a horizontal plain. What is key to consider is the vertical footprint the larger towers will have downtown. These towers will

obviously impact the protected public spaces and residential neighbourhoods. By way of example, one of the most used and cherished public places in Burlington, the civic square in front of city hall will be shrouded in shade for much of the day because of the twin towers proposed for Brant and James Street.

I would ask that council members consider doing this simple visualization tomorrow morning before you reconvene your meeting. Look up at the tower being build behind Smiths. Take some pictures from a few angles, walk back to the east side of Brant across from City Hall and look up and at your photos. Then visualize that building height on each corner across from City Hall...it's a ominous, dark, intimidating visual experience. So out of place! Brant Street is not University Avenue in Toronto with multiple traffic lanes and a wide boulevard. Brant Street is a meagre 2 lanes wide!

I now want to change focus. I viewed some of the video of the November delegation presentations.

One presentation I watched with interest was what I call The Ebullient developer representative. The gleeful developer rep who noted this was his shortest delegation presentation ever.

A most clear and obvious tell, like in poker, that developers are over the moon about the new recommended building height provisions. And why wouldn't they be happy – the planning heights are beyond anyone's expected height restrictions. In other words the developers get everything and then some in this proposed building regime. Is this is a case of those with the money (the developers) make the rules? I thought that was the job of our elected officials.

This alone motivates me to support the motion from Councillor Meed Ward regarding proposed changes to draft official plan downtown policies (PD-01-18). However there is more that concerns me...much more!

Another concern I have is that no character study has been completed in the downtown core. Seems to me a cart before horse scenario. Your question should be why are we not requesting a completed character study? Is not completing the character study only a serious oversight or something more diabolical.

You, as councillors, can't underestimate the traffic implications of this plan. Congestion, parking chaos and air pollution with the addition of over 3 thousand cars within 3 years in the core are amongst my key concerns.

I don't find any research in the 1000's of pages of studies on the health impacts of this rampant unfettered growth...no carbon footprint assessment here...that does not fit the build big at all costs narrative that planning is pushing. Instead, the non-stop hyper build, appears to be their development mantra.

I wanted to reiterate a point I made previously about the traffic implications

The planners state that, “Mitigating future traffic congestion associated with growth through a variety of measures, including development specific transportation demand management measures, enhanced pedestrian and cycling amenities and networks and strategic concentrations of height and density within walking distance of major transit stations...Wow!

How does most all of this bureaucratic double talk remotely address traffic congestion woes now and in the future.

If “specific transportation demand management measures” exist why aren’t they implemented now. Enhanced pedestrian and cycling amenities will help...not.

Witness the New Street diet fiasco!

And then the kicker, concentrations of height and density within walking distance of major transit stations. The Burlington bus station is not remotely a major transit station. Since large number of the massive condos are planned south of Caroline Street, the majority of new downtown condo residents will drive to the GO station or drive directly to their workplace. Words matter and the above objective bullet point is filled with words that when analyzed do not in my estimation pass a reality test. They are just wishful words.

Using mobility hubs as validation for plan is absurd as I described in my past delegation. Similarly I’m am not convinced that density measurement is up to date. How and how recently have density levels been measured? Actually in the latest updated report PB-11-18 the target of 200 living and or working people per hectare in the core by 2031 is conveniently omitted. Is that because staff has now realized that that year 2031 target will be met organically without hyper intensification?

Both of these factors are erroneously used to validate the framework that supports downtown planning conclusions.

I contend that the analysis and conclusions of those 2 factors are severely flawed. On the mobility hub factor the latest Report PB-11-18 city planners state, “Downtown Burlington is identified as an Anchor Mobility Hub due to its relationship with the City’s Urban Growth Centre; its potential to attract and accommodate new growth and development; the convergence of multiple local transit routes through the Downtown Bus Terminal; the linkages to GO Transit, the other Mobility Hubs and surrounding municipalities; and its ability to achieve densities that would be supportive of a multi-modal transportation plan.” Such a grandiose plan that is aspirational and unrealistic all at the same time. Don’t be fooled.

Growing the tax base is often used as a justification for development. Growing tax base is obviously important.

Yet I wonder if the the costs to upgrade infrastructure to service proposed intensification in the core will gobble up any growing tax base revenues created by these condos.

These are the questions U the elected officials must ask planning and most important ask yourselves.

Another issue I wanted to speak on briefly is the regrettable letter sent to ECOB by the city manager. I perceive it as unprofessional and divisive.

An odd and sad illustration of highly negative community consultations. Citizen engagement at it's worst!

In reviewing report PB-11-18 it appears to me that there is too much cherry picking of community feedback that conveniently supports the current planning narrative. So many of the multitude of constituency based concerns are glossed over or even worse, ignored.

By way of example the report states,

Allowing for greater building height can provide opportunities to retain heritage buildings and/or properties or integrate these heritage resources as part of a redevelopment. Under the current 8 storey building permission for the Downtown Core precinct, property owners may be more inclined to maximize a proposed redevelopment's building footprint to all corners of a property to achieve the greatest amount of usable floor space possible within the permitted height. This could come at the expense of existing heritage buildings located on properties, which are not designated, and other potential new public amenities that could be provided, as part of a redevelopment proposal.

The report goes on to say, "The increased maximum building height may attract redevelopment interest to the area resulting in new investment and improvements to heritage buildings as part of any future redevelopment. The increased development permissions could also incentivize owners to maintain and enhance the existing heritage resources, which can in some cases be difficult and costly."

So, in a nutshell what planning is absolutely sure of is that taller towers will magically support existing heritage resources. Sorta like Jack and the beanstalk building – the higher the building the more magic beans the owners will throw off their balconies to those pesky heritage folks to help them out...really!

The report goes on to state that "The key to achieving these benefits is ensuring that existing cultural heritage resources are adequately recognized and protected through policy, where appropriate. In addition to the existing and proposed city-wide cultural heritage resource policies contained within the Official Plan, the Downtown Mobility Hub Area Specific Plan (ASP) process is *currently undertaking additional Cultural Heritage Resource Assessments to understand potential impacts the proposed precinct plan could have to existing built heritage features within the Downtown Mobility Hub*, including within the Downtown Core precinct.

Again, cart-horse analogy. Why do this assessment work after the official plan is approved. It makes no sense.

A last item to flag in report PB-11-18 was under the Options considered.

Planning folks Recognize the consistent focus of public and Council comments from the November 30 & December 1, 2017 Committee meeting regarding the potential

concentration of tall buildings within the proposed Downtown Core precinct. Finally an acknowledgement by planning of community and councillors concern about “the concentration of tall buildings within the downtown precinct. One of the planning department suggestions. Allow them to be built, just a little farther apart...really! The last few pages of the report reflect some positive movement in the planning departments thinking. Currently it’s a little but hopefully not too late. Perhaps this thinking can be the basis of an evolving Official Plan and downtown precinct plan, once serious refinements are added.

This will take time! In fact, to get it right, I strongly suggest the plan not be finalized and implemented until after the fall election.

For many of the reasons I’ve identified above I fully support Councillor Meed Ward’s motions 1 through 11. We need a more holistic approach to planning in Burlington I particularly give the absolute highest level of support to Motion 1 which reads, “Defer approval of Official Plan till after the 2018 Municipal Election

The motion includes a thoughtful rationale. The final 2 bullet points of the rationale capture what many in Burlington are now saying.

We need time to get this right and give the community more voice, by testing the proposed plan democratically via the 2018 election.

And secondly, There is no need or requirement from the province to rush this process.

Thanks very much for listening to my concerns on issues related to the most impactful community change this city will ever witness.