

Delegation to Council - January 23, 2018

The Burlington Community Engagement Charter dated - April 8, 2013 states, *"Engaging people on issues that affect their lives and their city is a key component of democratic society. Public involvement encourages participation, actions and personal responsibility. The goal of community engagement is to lead to more informed and, therefore, better decision-making"*. Document MM-1-16 dated April 11, 2016 recommended the approval of the Burlington 2015-2040 strategic plan. The document also recommended that, the Official Plan (OP) process be put on hold until the strategic plan was completed. The first call to delay the Official Plan came from that report and KPMG. MM-1-16 also included a report by KPMG that addressed many important issue areas. Part of that report, dealt with an on-line survey that asked the citizens to rate which, "Of the four Strategic Directions", was most important to us? The results of the survey were as follows, 41 % of us wanted a Healthy & Greener City, 24% of us wanted an Engaging City, 20% of us wanted A City that Moves and lastly only 14% wanted, A City that Grows. In June 2016, the city asked residents to choose between two phrases and select the one that best captures the spirit of the city's new direction for growth. Two-thirds of the hundreds of people surveyed chose "Grow Bold" over the other option, "We Are All In". Oddly enough what we ended up with, was a focus on growth and a branding campaign to support the direction.

I am here today because I am part of the 24%, who believes in engagement. That is why I engaged on 374 Martha St, that is why I engaged on 421 Brant, and that is why I contributed to some of the engagement opportunities that formed part of the Strategic plan and revised Official Plan process that has culminated in this meeting today.

When speaking of engagement or perhaps advocacy, it was Jane Jacobs' fierce advocacy for community, that ultimately put a halt to LOMEX, an expressway that would have gone right through the heart of New York City's Greenwich Village, and right over Washington Square Park. The Downtown Precinct Plan could become Burlington's version of LOMEX (Lower Manhattan Expressway) and is one reason why I am here to stop what Joni Mitchell spoke about in, "Big Yellow Taxi", except instead of paving over paradise and putting up a parking lot, we are about to destroy the character of our downtown by putting up steel and glass monoliths.

Urban designers use the term "urban grain" to describe the cellular structure of an urban environment. Grain can be used to describe the size of the smallest unit, of the urban environment, and the built environment at different scales, from the size of city blocks to the distribution of elements on a building. According to Greenlab 2014, *"Areas of high granularity have large numbers of small buildings on small lots (Our current downtown), while areas of low granularity have fewer, bigger buildings occupying large lots, (what our downtown will look like if this goes through) kind of like the difference between sand and gravel.*

So, why should we care about granularity? For some time developers have been consolidating large swaths of property from Lakeshore to Fairview, which according to the plan before us, will result in the monolithic redevelopment. Large areas of our downtown, Lakeshore, Elizabeth, Pearl and lower Brant are replete with monolithic buildings. On top of that more are being planned while others are already under construction. An inordinate concentration of tall buildings affects granularity (gravel), while reducing the character of our downtown.

As assemblage continues and it will continue, if we allow it to, this will further erode the diverse fine-grained mixture of our downtown. The more tall buildings that are constructed (and there are lots more in this proposed plan) the more granular our downtown will become. The consequences of loss of grain and therefore diversity is much more, large buildings appear in a short period of time, and then depreciate gradually over multiple decades. Such buildings according to (Merlino 2014) are "out of human scale, have no distinct historic texture or neighborhood character." Eventually, these monolithic structures will become obsolete, and an entire block or most of it will be demolished and then rebuilt. In her book entitled, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jane Jacobs stated that, "To generate

exuberant diversity in a city's streets and districts four conditions are indispensable":

1. "The district, and indeed as many of its internal parts as possible, must serve more than one primary function; preferably more than two..." (Our current Official Plan does that)
2. "Most blocks must be short; that is, streets and opportunities to turn corners must be frequent." (We have that as well)
3. "The district must mingle buildings that vary in age and condition, including a good proportion of old ones so that they vary in the economic yield they must produce. This mingling must be close-grained." (That we will lose under the new OP)
4. "There must be a sufficiently dense concentration of people" (We can meet this without over intensification)

There is a lot of talk about making Burlington more walkable and more complete. I live in a tall building situated in what will become the Tall Residential Precinct. From my home I can walk to two grocery stores. I can also walk to my family doctor, my specialist, the church I attend, my favorite restaurants, watchmaker, and cupcake store. Some of these walkable destinations will disappear under the current downtown precinct plan.

In closing and with your indulgence I would like to share the following story of the Abilene Paradox. It is a hot sunny afternoon in Coleman, Texas. A family is sitting enjoying themselves on the porch when the father-in-law suggests they all take a trip to Abilene, some 53 miles away to the north. "Sounds like a good idea," says his wife. "OK, if you want to go", says the father looking at his wife in the hope she detects some reluctance. "Well, of course I'd like to go," she says. "I haven't been to Abilene for ages." So off the family go on the long, hot and dusty trip. When they arrive, they go to a restaurant where the food is bad. They try to find something to do, but most places are shut. They just wander around in the heat of the day getting tired and irritable. On the way back, one of them dishonestly says, "It was a great trip, wasn't it?"

"The mother-in-law admits that, actually, she would rather have stayed at home. The husband says, "But I only went to satisfy you." The wife says, "And I only went along to keep you happy." The father-in-law then says that he only suggested it because he thought the others might be bored.

The group stops the car and sits back, puzzled why they all decided to take a trip when they would all have been happier sitting on the porch enjoying themselves at home.

The Paradox is often used to educate organizations on how to avoid making decisions they will later regret.

Aside from the sheer size of the OP and its associated documents I have pondered about what metaphor would best describe my discomfort with the OP as it stands today and the only metaphor that came to mind was a jigsaw puzzle. Except in this case a few jigsaw pieces are missing, and there is no clear picture or renderings of what our downtown will look like when completed. The approval of 421 Brant painted a clear picture of what the completed jigsaw puzzle would look like.

In closing I would like to acknowledge all the hard work that has been expended by staff and council on the challenging work that went into formulating both the Strategic Plan and new Official Plan that is before council. The reason so many citizens are paying attention to this plan, is because of what is at stake.

Today I am asking council for two things:

- (1) Place the revised Official Plan approval on hold until after the municipal election and
- (2) To take a fresh look at the downtown plan.

When Joni Mitchell penned the lyrics to Big Yellow Taxi, she was in Hawaii, but she could just as soon have been here, and the following would still apply:

"Don't it always seem to go

That you don't know what you've got

Till it's gone"

Thank You

Joseph A Gaetan B.G.S.