

Presentation to Planning and Development Committee by David McKay - April 24th, 2018

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I appreciate you taking yet another round of delegations on this matter. My comments will be made from the perspective of someone who has been involved as a citizen with planning issues in Burlington for some fifteen years, as a member of city advisory committees, community groups and as an individual. I have followed and on occasion participated in the development of this plan for seven years as it followed a windy and sometimes unpredictable road.

One cannot of course, comment on the entire plan, and I shall confine my remarks to three aspects:

First, I must commend council and staff for realizing and accepting that so much had happened and was happening since the completion of the previous plan that amendments alone would not suffice, and for having the courage and commitment to build an entirely new plan.

The process of developing this ambitious document included an extensive amount of citizen engagement with numerous public meetings on various aspects of the plan and finally on the document as a whole; with frequent opportunities to appear before committee or council. While some of these events were not entirely amicable, there was opportunity to comment or suggest and these meetings did result in alterations to the final plan. The amount of time given to the engagement process and numerous revisions and rewrites of parts of the plan were much greater than had occurred during the development of previous plans.

Secondly I would comment on a specific part of the new plan which is indicative of a realization that our City is big enough and varied enough that different areas need different treatment in a City Wide Planning Document. My community was involved in the "Neighbourhood Character Study" which resulted in specific planning requirements and control by-laws for particular communities with a particular history and particular needs. This was achieved through an extensive consultative process between city staff, neighbourhood associations, outside consultants and individual residents. The process was lengthy, challenging, and at times frustrating but in the end it brought positive results for all parties involved. There are other areas of the plan which reflect this type of community based planning.

Finally I wish to give "my take" on a portion of the plan which has been the focus of much of the recent discussions - The Downtown Transportation Hub. To fully evaluate this part of the Official Plan it is necessary to know and understand how we got to where we are at present.

It began, really, with the Provincial Greenbelt Plan, developed in the middle of the previous decade by a Group headed by our then mayor, Rob McIsaac. This plan, while needed and beneficial in its curbing of urban sprawl, had a profound and immediate effect on our City as virtually all of its undeveloped land (about 50% of our area) became part of the Greenbelt or the Niagara Escarpment Lands and Alton became our last subdivision. Then of course came "Places to Grow" - a detailed outlining of where the millions of new residents of the "Greater Golden Horseshoe" were to be accommodated over the next 20 years. Municipalities were not given any say in this allotment, and Burlington received its quota of new residents to be accommodated; and this would be need to be through "infill".

In addition, the municipality had to establish a "designated growth area" where the number of jobs and residents per hectare would be the highest. Burlington chose to designate its downtown as this growth area. Here, Mr. Chair, is exhibit A from an event held almost 10 years ago. The Mayor's Downtown Summit was a daylong event that brought together council, staff, invited speakers and interested citizens to talk about how the requirements of the designated area could be met within a downtown area of limited size, surrounded on three sides by residential communities. One conclusion at least was clear - growth would be vertical, not horizontal as is true in the core of any City. The questions were how high and how often.

The implementation of Places to Grow went relatively smoothly for some years - high rise buildings were erected on the north side of Lakeshore, with one now being built on the south. Existing high rises on Elgin and Ontario were joined by the Strata on Maple and another high rise on Brock and the Berkeley on John St. is now well underway. In the main the heights of these buildings were peacefully negotiated and put the city well on the way meeting its targets.

Two recent events have created challenges for the City and suddenly made citizens aware of just how much growth others would like to thrust upon us. First the direct appeal to the OMB of the proposed building at Martha and Lakeshore where a height far beyond that planned by the city was requested; and to the astonishment and dismay of almost all of us it was granted. Clearly the OMB continues to worship at the Altar of the Provincial Policy statement, whose mantra is "Intensification above all". Second, the deadline for OMB referrals to be heard under the 'old' system brought forward a raft of applications by companies, some of whom did not have a clear idea of just what they were going to do, but didn't want to deal with the new system. Visualizing all that infill in and around our core is quite unsettling.

So what to do? Certainly the growth that has taken place and will take place in the core is significant and will change the tenor and tone of our downtown streetscape. We do not need all the proposed structures to meet the Places to Grow requirements; indeed there are not enough prospective downtown condominium owners to fill them all if they were to be built.

Burlington did not ask for the Federal Government to add four million immigrants to the Greater Golden Horseshoe area; Burlington did not ask for growth quotas; Burlington did not ask for an unending supply of developers with deep pockets who all think that they can make a good profit out from yet another condo tower; Burlington did not ask for an outside arbitrator who seems wedded to intensification regardless....But that's what we got.

We are seven years into formulation of this plan and have included as much input from as many people as possible. There are no clear alternatives to its proposed directions. It is time to approve it and get on with the business of doing as much as we can to make it work .

Thank you.