

# RURAL, REALLY?



## **October 21, 2019 Burlington Council Meeting to Consider Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) Funded Brant and Lakeshore Intersection Rainbow Crosswalk**

Burlington city manager Mr. Tim Commisso recently gave us the green light to return to City of Burlington committees and council. It was clear when we attended this week's COW (Committee of the Whole) and P&D (Planning and Development Committee); the first since our almost two and a half year forced absence, that we would have to do a bit of research to determine what was actually being talked about at the meetings. We had some difficulties reading the screens and with terms that were being used that were not familiar to us. For example, we thought infill meant landfill and found it very difficult to understand how houses would be located next to landfill sites spread throughout the city. Thank goodness for Google. We soon stood corrected and now we know infill developments simply mean a renovation of the home or homes on the building lot next to homes that are occupied.

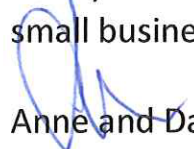

Terminology seemed to us to be somewhat different, as did the Meed Ward stamped Council Chambers. The sad, sad tales coming from the lectern were horrifyingly similar to those we had listened to with tears in our eyes in the months, or was it years, before our forced absence. Perhaps they were the same. We heard this was the twentieth delegation on the same issue from at least one person. Tuesday, October 8, 2019 the stories of the effect on the financial, physical and emotional health of delegation after delegation speaking

on the impact on their lives of inadequate development oversight/lack of regulations for Airbnbs was heartbreaking. The stories have been captured by the city webcaster and are available on the city website. Warning - make sure you have Kleenex very close by.

We almost felt out of place as we took our turn at the lectern to deal with the issue of the lack of accountability and transparency at this new to us city council. Councillors will soon celebrate one year of office, except for Councillor Sharman and Mayor Meed Ward who are coming up to year eleven. We had for the first time in our over thirty years of interacting with Council been unable to find reports for several items on the COW and P&D agenda. We finally got the reports just before the weekend which meant no one was available to answer questions that would determine the necessity of our delegations. It was only after our COW delegation that we were able to get back to the committee clerk for clarification on a paragraph that did not make sense to us. As usual she was as helpful as possible and advised the report writer, Helen Walihura, would call us. The subject of the need for clarification related to the statement *In May of 2018 the City received \$191,757.80 of funding through Ontario's Main Street Revitalization Initiative* and a proposed reallocation of these funds from Civic Square revitalization to Brant/Lakeshore intersection (making it a candidate for a rainbow crossing), along with the refurbishment of light poles and street furnishings for downtown.

Google again saw us become fully informed on the initiative introduced just before the 2018 provincial election. It provided \$26 million as part of a \$40 million investment over three years and was introduced at the Rural Ontario Municipal Association January 2018 by Jeff Leal the Liberal Ontario Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. Leal was also at that time the Minister Responsible for Small Businesses. We read that the revitalization initiative expands upon and complements the Downtown Revitalization Program that supports main street revitalization in rural areas (our emphasis). The two words rural areas connected the dots in the somewhat rusty section of our brains that deals with civic matters and we could now understand why funding for these downtown revitalization projects were being provided by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) rather than the Ministry of Municipal Affairs.

We will have to wait though to find out if during our absence from civic affairs, for some reason downtown Burlington now has a rural designation. During the 2018 municipal election Anne spent a good part of the time being filled in on issues that the farming community were having with the Burlington and Halton official plan. Downtown Burlington being changed to rural, however, was never the subject of our conversations! But what other explanation is there for the recommendation that is scheduled to go to council on October 21, 2019 to reallocate over \$191,000 of funding that Burlington acquired first for revitalization of Civic Square and must use before March 2020. The Minister's Office contact for the funding initially announced as available January 23, 2018 is Avi Yufest at 416-326-3067. If there is no contact from City Hall soon we will need to try that route to see if we can get our answers. If status quo remains we wonder how Councillor Rory Nissan will explain a rainbow crosswalk at the Brant/Lakeshore intersection being funded from monies OMAFRA slated to help small businesses in rural areas through the revitalization of their downtowns!

  
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For Delegation at Council on COW Report CM-22-19 October 21, 2019