

January 15, 2020

From: Tom Muir, Resident

To: City Council and Planning Committee.

Subject: Attached below written delegation to Council and Planning Committee on Reports on Land Use Planning, Looking at Downtown, and the ICBL

Dear Councilors;

I will not be appearing personally at Council and Committee meetings to delegate my resident views on these important matters, however, I wish to provide this written delegation to Council, for the record of these proceedings, to express my interest and views on matters relevant to this debate and decision-making.

I provided an edited version of this delegation, without my introductory sentences, to the Burlington Gazette as an open message to Council and it was published there on January 14. It is to be read in the context of the public meeting on these subjects held by Council on January 14, 2020.

I intend this comment to be an open written delegation to Council in the course of their deliberations on these matters beginning on January 14, 2020, and continuing with the Council schedule until the end of January.

There were several delegations reported in the Gazette yesterday that I was not aware of at the time I wrote this comment on the delegation of Gary Scobie. In reading these others I find that I am generally supportive of the ECoB and WeLoveBurlington (Crosbie-Smith) delegations, and Councilors will see numerous points I make that are consonant with expressions made in these.

I agree wholeheartedly with the Gary Scobie delegation on these matters in another of his well-expressed delegations. I remember a long time ago he examined this issue in the Gazette and even then he thought the efforts to make these changes he suggests would not be so easy and needed to start right away.

I myself brought this up several times in the engagement process the city held recently on this general matter of Downtown and a new OP. I have seen nothing of this appear anywhere in what I have seen in the planning department reporting out on this engagement.

In the Planning documents tabled for Council consideration, staff have made no visible effort to acquaint Council with the long time public concern about the need to set in motion a staff and Council effort to at least get rid of the MTSA designation of the downtown bus stop. Moreover, as Gary states, the Dillon consultant report clearly writes that this bus stop will never function as an MTSA and this designation should be removed, and this would be good planning.

In support of that, a concept plan is obviously needed to illustrate what the downtown plan could look like with that policy removed from the planning frame. This concept information is apparently not provided to the deliberations of this Council and the public on the scoping and the reexamination of the OP, the Downtown portions, and the ICBL that they approved to be done.

This means that this deleted MTSA policy concept has been lost from the basis of their decision-making on this matter. This has, in my view, important implications for the upcoming Council decision-making process

The apparent loss of staff listening skills in their public engagement, and their gauging of public concerns damages the credibility of the scoping of the work plan used to do this. In this scoping, done several months ago, my attention was caught by what I continue to see right now, as a stark contradiction between the way the scoping outline work plan expressed the terms of public engagement to address public concerns, vision, values and support, and what I see delivered here.

In the Work Plan for this scoped re-examination submitted to Committee on May 21, it was stated on page 3:

“It was indicated that Council and the public are expecting that the outcome of the work will: -Be reflective of the community’s vision for the future of Burlington; -Be that residents believe that the Official Plan represents their values for the future of the City; -Be supported by an effective public engagement process; and -Be supported by the public.”.

However, further to this, also on page 3, it is stated that;

“As identified generally by Council, this need for public satisfaction of the plan must be married with the desire to develop a plan that is defensible from a land use planning perspective. In order to achieve success the project team must transparently: -educate and communicate the givens (e.g. the plan must conform to provincial policy);”... .

I had to wonder what the planning department was really saying here about the contingent nature of public engagement and support. What I see is the planning department really saying that their interpretation of a defensible conforming to provincial policy OP will be determinant in a new OP and what happens Downtown. It will not be public say, values, vision, and satisfaction because they are contingent on this staff interpretation.

I see this as entering dangerous ground for progressive movement forward for the city in regaining control of planning and development.

Cementing this, the MTSA implications and options were never in the engagement process. So, the public request to move towards removing the MTSA at least in the Downtown, as a given – and a main driver as it turns out for the entire City – is basically ignored from what I see. The public vision, values and support for the Downtown will not be met with the MTSA designation not removed.

I think staff (and maybe with consent of Council) over-controlled the rules of engagement, got what they wanted to hear by restricting the planning concepts and policies considered. As a result the reexamination of the OP and the restricted planning concepts underlying the preferred concept for Downtown including the MTSA, and not removing it, falls decisively short of what I was expecting.

From my experience, all this drafted New OP proposal and plans for Downtown, if adopted by Council, will do is create a repeat of the exhausting pattern faced by citizens over and over in Burlington planning and development matters: first outrage, then another told-you-so disappointment, and finally, resignation that nothing ever changes in the development and planning agenda in the City of Burlington, no matter what is said or promised.

So it looks to me very much consistent with repeated statements from others suggesting that there is no visible hope for residents concerned with over-development in Downtown, Intensification areas, and MTSA areas City-wide, and for my local interest, with good cause, Ward 1 and Aldershot in particular.