

August 20, 2020

Members of Council and City Planning Staff:

Subject: Downtown Urban Growth Centre (UGC) and Major Transit Station Areas (MTSA) Designations (PL-33-20)

At the August 11, 2020 Community Planning, Regulations & Mobility Committee meeting a report containing recommendations from Director of Community Planning, Heather MacDonald, was unanimously approved.

Committee's recommendation is being considered for ratification by City Council at their August 24, 2020 meeting.

If the recommendations from Director MacDonald are ratified by council, the decision will be made in the absence of public engagement or even an opportunity for any members of the public or stakeholders to know what the recommendations consider to propose or how it would affect the residents of Burlington and its long-term future.

This report and the contained recommendations, as approved by Committee, lacks sufficient information to allow residents to visualize, understand or comment on how an unspecified UGC adjustment affects them, their neighborhood, or their city. Debating or even commenting on the merits of an unknown adjustment to the UGC is simply not possible prior to being informed of the details and potential implications.

In the absence of the details or fully vetting such changes and the long-term impacts with the residents of Burlington, it is astonishing Mayor Meed Ward and all six members of our elected council would even consider approving any recommendations that involves an unknown adjustment to one of the fundamental and most significant city-defining elements. Even more astonishing is the fact that these recommendations were presented and unanimously approved by the Community Planning, Regulations and Mobility Committee totally void of public consultation.

These recommendations did not happen in a vacuum. Director MacDonald was directed by Council to provide this report however, council failed to ensure a robust conversation about this matter. Without public engagement being undertaken prior to her recommendations, Director MacDonald did not have the benefit of resident's thoughts and opinions. As a result, what committee has approved, and council is considering for ratification is being rushed. If approved in the absence of any details and public engagement, the decision can only be considered as a political response to complex matters that must be thoroughly reviewed, analyzed and be the result of public scrutiny. We have endured years of downtown planning initiatives, always with opportunities for public input. This mayor and council would choose to deny residents that opportunity, the public and stakeholders deserve much better.

It was somewhat encouraging that the Committee did endorse a direction for Director MacDonald to report back on September 15 with an engagement plan. After reviewing the video of the committee meeting, it became clear this was to be an engagement plan determined by the Region (not the city) with input from Director MacDonald.

While establishing an engagement plan at the Region is encouraging, establishing it some three weeks after Council has decided on these recommendations lacks transparency and challenges our local democratic process. In fact, during the committee meeting it was clear Director MacDonald and Regional Staff have already been working on this request for an UGC adjustment prior to the finalization and consideration of the Directors report, its recommendations, or Council's approval.

As a result, residents are now left with limited information regarding a major factor in how the city will grow and unable to provide an informed opinion or comment regarding an undefined UGC adjustment and how that might affect the Region's Official Plan review.

Approving any recommendations that have significant and potentially dramatic and detrimental impacts on the City's future without any opportunities for public engagement and the checks and balances that go with it, would be a complete failure of this councils commitment to transparency and public engagement

I am requesting that this matter be deferred, details of this adjustment provided, and the implications analyzed and reviewed with the public prior to any further consideration or recommendation to the region or province for approval. Engage Burlington residents and stakeholders and inform all interested of any proposed changes and consider their comments and suggestions. This enables an informed discussion regarding the extent and merits of any adjustment to the Downtown UGC boundary.

By approving this report and its recommendations as written and with the knowledge there was no public engagement, this council is choosing to shut out and ignore their constituents, the very people that voted them into office. That raises serious questions regarding the transparency, accountability and even the credibility of this Council's decision-making process.

When considering these recommendations, ask yourselves this, Do I know the details of the proposed adjustment to the UGC? Has council provided an opportunity for residents and stakeholders to review those details and provide their input and express their thought and concerns?

This is a defining moment for our City and the residents of Burlington, it deserves a level of consideration that is commensurate with its significance.

Regards

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