

Recommended modifications to adopted official plan policies for neighbourhood centres and for mixed use nodes and intensification corridors (PL-18-20)
Delegation to Special Meeting of Council October 7, 2020 – Official Plan

I am Perry Bowker, a resident of Aldershot. As I am unable to delegate in person to the October 7 Council Meeting, I offer the following for your consideration.

First of all, Council and Staff are to be commended for bringing forward an excellent product in the Amended Official Plan. They have worked hard and made every attempt to obtain input and buy-in from the citizenry. We can only hope it will survive the inevitable push-back from developers and the Province.

I wish to offer a couple of suggestions for things which, by its very nature, the OP process seems to exclude, but ought to be essential when it comes to implementation.

First, I want to comment on matters of Heritage. Great attention has been paid to preserving Heritage in Burlington, and rightly so. Heritage is our cultural memory of the thousands who have built and sacrificed in the past to create the city where we live. Heritage buildings and neighborhoods represent, in tangible form, the diversity and optimism of people who went before. Neighborhoods have character, a spirit, a vibe, which can be felt by anyone. Which leads to a question: a hundred years from now, will people look back at what we are building today and see a heritage worth celebrating?

I submit that the profession of architecture seems to have largely gone underground lately, swept away by the presumed urgency to build, build, build. While giving great credence to “Built Form”, we build fast and boring to extract the maximum profit per square metre and move on. One only needs to look at the development around Brant St. GO, which resembles an assembly of Lego blocks, or Aldershot GO which looks like an old military barracks with a new paint job. Every development proposal for a condo tower comes with an “artist’s impression” which looks impressive, surrounded by green space full of happy people, but somehow is just the same glass pile stacked 20, 30, 50 stories high. There is no vibe, no relevance to the surroundings, no soul.

I submit that tall buildings ought to be considered as another form of public art – and an extremely visible one. Developers should be required to defend the architectural merit in their proposals, subject to the same criteria as any other public art - like distinctiveness, novelty, suitability for the setting, standing for something, uplifting to the eye and spirit. Major cities like London and New York do this well; Toronto and the GTA does not. (I should add that I do not have this criticism of many of the low-rise projects springing up, which do have these qualities.)

So as we go forward, let’s be sure we build something that will stand the test of time and become part of our contribution to the city’s heritage.

My second point, and I will be brief, is that while the Official Plan is good, the City should soon start developing Plan B. This is not my first rodeo with OP amendments, and so I am keenly sensitive to the risk of unintended consequences, especially as long as the OMB/LPAT exists. After all, the OP process is driven top-down by the Province on projections based on visions of unlimited economic prosperity and population growth. Then teams of consultants/planners allocate the overall growth into targets to Regions, Municipalities, and eventually to Wards and Neighborhoods. To believe that anything like this can be reliably forecast 25 years into the future is folly, yet that is what we do, and build accordingly. But we know things will happen: growth demand will shift to somewhere else, the nature of jobs will change, predictable “unexpected” events like COVID will occur, and so forth – making it unwise to cast everything into stone. Events on the ground will trump the projections of consultants and the government itself, as we can see all around us right now. For example, there is the possibility that the 40, 50, 80-story towers going up in Toronto may become uninhabitable due to inability to service 1,000 residents when they can only be allowed three or four to an elevator. Or that the technical capability to export jobs to remote regions could empty the cities in a few years. Long term planning must build in the ability to pivot when circumstances require it.

In conclusion, thank you for a great job, we should celebrate. But then please spend some time thinking about Plan B.