

Correspondence from Josie Wagstaffe regarding Submission on Region of Halton's
Official Plan Discussion Papers (PL-28-20)

From:
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Subject: To be included in the public record - Downtown Burlington - Urban Design Guidelines
Date: Sunday, September 27, 2020 9:57:46 PM

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Good morning Ms. Enns,

I strongly believe that the best way for constituents to communicate their opinion on any issues discussed at the city should be through their elected official. I'd like to ask all council members to read not just mine but everyone else's comments, as they represent us, the public, and consider the well-being of our city. I had a few conversations with my ward councillor regarding the vision for our downtown, and I am certain that Councillor Kearns has a perfectly clear understanding of what I think about the proposed vision. Nevertheless, I recognize the fact that the staff has been working on gathering community input, so I would like to add a few comments for the record. Please include this in the official material for the September 30th meeting.

Most of us are currently preoccupied with the pandemic and are trying to brace ourselves for whatever this fall and upcoming winter will bring, which leaves us with very little time for much else. Therefore, it wouldn't surprise me if at this point in the process you are not getting many comments. I can only hope that you won't misinterpret that and conclude that people are no longer interested.

As stated on page 7 of the Guidelines, they were primarily created for "developers, professional consultants, and other proponents of development". As far as the public is concerned, the Guidelines are to "provide the public with confidence in the City's commitment to the vision for a high standard of urban design and reflect the extensive public engagement that has taken place."

I personally think that the public would prefer having the Guidelines that would provide us with confidence in the City's commitment to the vision for our downtown, rather than the vision for a standard of urban design. This in itself brings me to the following question - **To what extent do these guidelines truly reflect all that extensive public engagement?** I spoke to the staff at the community pop-ups, I attended public meetings, I signed up for city updates on this project, I listened to quite a few great delegations, I followed discussion on social media etc...And here we are, quite a few months later, having that terrible feeling that what is presented to us is still just another variation of the original plan.

I took a few notes during the December 5, 2019 council meeting regarding the 13 main themes that came out of the public engagement process. My notes were not very detailed, but here are some of the themes: greenspace, walkability, traffic and parking, maintaining the character of the downtown, waterfront (this theme came out very strong apparently), protecting Village Square (also very strong). In reviewing the guidelines, I was looking for the main "themes" listed above.

For example, if you search for "**greenspace**" through the 72 pages of the guidelines, the word comes up only once, on page 16, where the guidelines state that "careful consideration for

phasing is needed to ensure future streets, blocks and greenspace can be provided in the best location for future development". Throughout the public engagement process, protection of existing greenspace (and possibly creating more greenspace) came out as one of the "themes" that was very important to most participants. Are these guidelines in fact clearly stating that we need to protect our greenspace? I searched for such a statement very carefully and found that the word "protect" is mentioned 10 times throughout these guidelines. For example, when talking about Mixed-Use Precinct on page 24 - "Developments within the precinct should maintain, protect and preserve existing mature trees and front yard landscaping". Also, "Development should arrange buildings on the site to protect existing open space" (page 25); or "services and structures should be placed to complement the visual characteristics and protect views to the Natural Heritage System (page 43); as well as "Views to Lake Ontario from the public realm and landmarks are important to protect" (page 44). I am pretty sure that we, the public, were hoping for something more than landscaping and protecting "views". I understand that these guidelines were written primarily for the developing industry, and I can see how they would be satisfied with having the protection of greenspace reduced to "guidance on how the built form can protect and enhance views", as stated on page 44. But, can we really claim that they also address our hopes of protecting and creating greenspace? I find this very disappointing given the fact that our Council unanimously declared a climate emergency last year. I understand that the Guidelines had a different purpose, but I would still like to see some indication that from now on, any future construction in our city should take climate change into consideration. I fully agree that developers should at least attempt some basic front yard landscaping (so we don't end up with a building such as 2030 Caroline Street, for example), but I was hoping for and expecting more than having our vision of protecting the greenspace reduced to mere mention of landscaping and "green connector streets". These guidelines also don't mention the fact that with this pandemic the world is faced with an unprecedented crisis and as a society, we are learning that the way we live and work is changing. For example, the number off permanent residents admitted to Canada dropped by 64 per cent between April and June, compared to the same time last year. Since Canada relies on having a large number of people coming to the country to fuel growth, should we not pause for a bit and rethink our numbers? We are also learning that working from home is now a possibility for many of us, and if given an option, we don't like to be stuck in small condos with large groups of people, and prefer to have access to green space, parks and trails. Are we really planning for the future if we are not at all addressing these questions?

I also wanted to see how these guidelines address another important "theme" that came out of the engagement process - **protecting the character of the downtown**.

Again, the guidelines encourage the design of "built environments consistent with the vision and character for the Downtown" (page 5), and also talk about "small retail shops and eclectic main street character" (page 11); and suggest that "Podiums should incorporate articulation and design detailing that emphasizes the rhythm and scale of the existing character" (page 12). Again, there are some hints and suggestions that the character of our downtown should be protected in the statements above, but that's all I could find. Hints, and certainly no clear statement. I guess part of the problem comes from the fact that when providing guiding principles for the proposed vision (page 8), the guidelines are still referring to The Downtown Urban Growth Centre and Major Transit Station designations, something our council is trying to have adjusted and removed! Why would we base our vision on those designations if we are actively working on having them removed??

Is this plan better than the one that would allow 20-some storeys on Brant St? Absolutely! But, as we all know, the tower currently being built on Brant Street was a mistake and should never have happened. People spoke against it loud and clear in the last election. Therefore, having more 20-some storey buildings on Brant Street is really no longer an option and should not

have been a starting point of the conversation. Starting point for Brant St. should have been 4 to 8 storey buildings, which is what our current OP allows! Having first 20m at 3 storeys on Brant Street but then allowing the rest of the block to have 11 story buildings is far from the 'Burlington Made Solution' we were hoping for. We are still going to have to deal with shadows, wind tunnels, traffic congestion etc. I was personally hoping for a loud and clear statement saying we will protect the downtown and it's small-town character, and will maintain all those characteristics that make it unique. Yes, I do realize we have to conform to the regional and provincial mandate, but we also know that no guidelines are really defensible as long as we have to deal with LPAT. So why not focus on our collective vision instead?

Protecting Village Square was another theme that was very important to everyone who participated in the public engagement part of the process. Nevertheless, while searching for a firm statement that would reflect this in the guidelines, the best I could find was the following sentence - "Development should maintain and enhance views of the Village Square." This to me sounds like a pure suggestion and not a loud and clear statement! I am very happy to see that Mayor Meed-Ward and Councillor Kearns are going to put forward amendments that would better protect heritage of the Village Square which is of utmost importance to many of us, as well as the public service use of the Downtown East Precinct, and give more protections for established neighbourhoods. Without those amendments, we really can not claim that our Village Square is protected.

I am not going to search for the rest of the 13 themes these guidelines were supposed to address, as I just don't have the time it would take to complete that process. Also, this email would be way too long if I was to start commenting on Old Lakeshore Precinct or concerns regarding protection of our Waterfront. Instead, I would just like to state that I do see an improvement in the way the engagement was conducted, but at the end of the day, most of us feel like our voices are still not being heard, and these guidelines are certainly not representing our collective vision for the downtown.

Kind regards,

Josie Wagstaffe