

Good morning Council members, City staff, and residents of Burlington. I had planned to speak to the Zoning Bylaw Project at last week's Community Planning Meeting but was unable to attend, so I do hope there are folks from the Project Team listening today.

Firstly, I'm glad this process has finally started, but I'd be remiss if I didn't state my disappointment in the amount of time it's taken to get to this stage, and the additional time it will take before any changes are approved and finalized, because I'm concerned about what that means for communities that are in a constant state of transition or have developments pending. With that said, I'll just share a few comments for the Project & Consulting Team to consider, and talk about the importance of public participation:

* Current zoning bylaws present challenges for residents, developers, business owners, and City staff. Changes to these bylaws can help address affordable housing needs, climate change & environmental concerns, and cater to changing demographics, among other things. But they must also protect existing residents and their investment & enjoyment of their home. There are plenty of examples of residents experiencing anxiety, stress and monetary expense as a result of overdevelopment in their neighbourhoods. Valuable members of the community have left Burlington for the same reason. Staff indicated that they wish to reduce the number of Committee of Adjustment hearings being processed. Agreed! Please understand how upsetting it can be for a resident to read a report for a proposed development which states "Staff do not anticipate any adverse or negative impacts to neighbouring properties". Let's eliminate the opportunity for subjective opinion and look at issues in broader context. No one should ever have to battle their neighbour at the Committee of Adjustment, or feel forced out of their community.

* We have an opportunity here to learn from others' perspectives and understand how one community's needs and challenges are different from another's. Provide a forum for such conversation and you might even create a more empathetic, connected city. Let's eliminate the word "Nimby" from conversations related to zoning or housing needs. It's a contentious term and often used without proper context or understanding of another's circumstances. And frankly, when you get to the heart of it, one could argue that we're all Nimbys on some level.

* I ask the Project Team if they will be using the best tools to engage the public? Could you activate Park Ambassadors again? Speak to neighbourhood associations, community organizations, visit seniors centres, or talk to those who live near developments where known zoning concerns exist? Online surveys and virtual meetings are helpful but have their limitations. If you want to get the public enthusiastic about participating, you need to be creative in how you connect with the public in order to have those conversations.

* To residents of Burlington who may be listening or watching: If you care what happens in your community, if you want to have a say in how your neighbourhood takes shape, now is the time to show up and speak up. It's not enough to say you want to see change and then sit back and let others come up with solutions. It's not enough to complain online or rant on social media. And unfortunately, it's not even enough to have your Councillor advocate on an issue. Please get involved and be a part of the solution. When we become complacent, decisions are made without us, and for us. Many residents are exhausted by the delegation process and view engagement as a waste of time. I get it. It consumes a lot of time and energy, often for little to nothing in return. We all want to know that the effort has been worth our while. This team says they are listening. Let's hold them to it. I will also be watching to see who shows up from the development community. Given the number of applications and appeals this City deals with, one would think developers should have a lot to contribute to zoning conversations.

And finally, to everyone running for election or re-election: many of you have identified growth of the City or intensification issues as area of importance on your platforms, so it seems safe to say you would also give some weight to Zoning Bylaw changes. Regardless of the election outcome, can we expect to see you be active participants in this Project? We hope your interest and commitment does not stop at the ballot box.

Thank you.