

Good afternoon Mayor Meed-Ward, Chair and Members of the Committee. My name is Lydia Thomas and I am a retired senior living on Filman place in Aldershot Burlington.

Did you know that from 2019 to 2022, the Burlington Food Bank has seen a staggering 94% increase in total visits? That is almost double over the last 4 years. And if that does not shock and motivate us to do better, let's look at benchmarks - this 94% Burlington increase in Food bank visits is more than double that of Ontario (43%) and almost triple that of Canada (35%). (1)

And unlike other cities, the Burlington Food bank isn't just supplying food to poor neighbourhoods. No, according to the Food Bank, Burlington is unique - because our poverty is well hidden and it is found in EVERY demographic. It is every age, every ethnicity, every gender and virtually every neighbourhood. (1) Cost increases including Burlington Property Tax increases are forcing most Burlington residents into financial instability and driving them to the food banks.

Seniors are one of our most vulnerable groups that need support and we are failing them. In 2022, there was a 312% increase in seniors visits to the Burlington Food Bank compared to 2018. Seniors are on a fixed income but living costs continue to climb. 1 And the solution to subsidize low income seniors with credits does not solve the problem. Why? Because in Burlington all residents including those with full time jobs are struggling to maintain their standard of living and stay in their homes. We are all being forced to tap into our savings or worse, the equity in our homes. It is assumed that because we have an income we are ok. Well, that is just not the case with these property tax increases.

I consider my family one of the lucky ones- we have a beautiful home and enough food such that we do not need to visit the Food Bank. But we are a senior's family facing the same challenges. Our income has remained the same while costs have gone dramatically up. Our retirement plan that we meticulously laid out is out the window. Why ? Because we did not plan for food prices and utility costs and gas prices and mortgage rates to skyrocket. We did not plan for our savings and investments to be eroded due to a slumping economy. And we certainly did not expect the city to kick us when we're down by increasing our property taxes over 7% last year.

Hamilton supposedly has much higher property taxes than Burlington but I have a friend who's residential home on Highland Rd. is 35% bigger and with a lot 4 times the size of mine and is only paying 6% more than we are which suggests to me that our MPAC assessments are elevated. (3)

Oakville is running their city on a property tax rate of 0.76 % vs our 0.86. (2) Last year their tax increase was 1.5% and 3.8% this year. Based on those Oakville figures, our 7% Burlington increase from last year should cover us off with no increases for the next 3 years. Why can't we run our city on a 0.76% rate? What are they doing that we are not?

Instead, you are doubling down with another 6% increase this year. Is this the best that the City Council can do for the citizens of Burlington?

We the residents of Burlington deserve better. We ask that you **hold every new spend proposal up against the face of employed Burlington residents and seniors that are visiting the Food Bank, that have homes that are becoming unaffordable.**

Do we really need that sidewalk on Park Street right now? Why are we adding winter maintenance to 20 city parks this year when we have not had it in the past?

Do we really need 46 new hires? Do we need 8 people to help optimize new digital tools? Digital solutions are supposed to increase efficiencies not increase headcount.

With my CPG background I suggest you consider training existing employees to become subject matter experts that can lead the implementation and be go to people for your staff vs. Hiring 3rd party resources that know nothing about your processes.

The point is : Find ways to do more with less.

Self Fund new initiatives. Utilize volunteers and redeploy resources.

Better utilize that 7% increase from last year and commit to a Zero tax rate increase for 2024.

Find a way or we will surely be seeing more homeless families and more neighbours and seniors visiting the Food Bank.

Is this really the vision that you have for Burlington?

Is this really the best that you, our elected officials can do for us?

Thank-you.

Footnotes (as per Councillor Nisan's questions):

1. 2022/2023. Burlington Foodbank Hunger Report https://www.burlingtonfoodbank.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Hunger-Report-2023_FINALWEB_SPREAD.pdf

2. 2023. WOVA report

3. Note that the effects of property taxes also depends on MPAC assessment timing and Parameters. It appears that ours favours higher property tax \$'s when compared to Hamilton. This may be in part due to Burlington land values based on location and demand but the difference in value seems inordinately high. And once MPAC assessments occur this property increase will be a further shock to finances.

Post Note #1 to meeting

Councillor Nisan mentioned a survey where the majority say they are okay with an increase. The survey that I had said that I had seen was very different (see Attached). 39% want 0% increase and 31% are okay with 1-3 %. I would suggest that we do not know if most of the 31% prefer 1% over 3% but I would venture that is the case.

Post Note #2 to Meeting:

Councillor Sharman mentioned during the meeting follow up that efficiencies and redundancies have already been addressed. Respectfully, this job is never done. There is always more to be done and there are always more savings and redundancies. I know this from working 30 years at CPG companies and meeting tough budget cut mandates. (Saying no to old projects, cutting those that are important but not urgent and urgent but not important, etc.). Every company (or in this case, City) will say they have cut to the bone but surprisingly, when forced to find the \$\$ and efficiencies, it will be found. It is just a matter of hard choices.