

September 4, 2018
Planning Committee
Hamilton City Hall

I come before you this morning as a spokesperson for the landscape, in this case the landscape of Chedoke Valley and the creek that runs through it, where this proposed development would take place. My position is that the valley and creek are a living part of the natural heritage of the city, and should be respected as such.

In the report before you, there is little mention made of Chedoke Valley, or that the proposal involves filling in part of it. The valley wall is referred to as “the slope”, as though a valley no longer exists there. Given the fact that the 403 runs through and dominates it, this is perhaps not a surprise.

But Chedoke Valley does exist. It existed before the 403 came along, and it exists still. Its stories are embedded in the story of our city.

For instance. The brick of the first brick homes in Hamilton comes from brickyards in the valley that used the clay dug from its slope.

Ainslie Woods was the name of a well-known picnic grounds in Chedoke Valley, long before it became the name of a former school & neighbourhood and former school. People got there via the Hamilton-Dundas Railway, which ran down into the valley, crossed the creek, and climbed up the other side, on a line between Main Street and Aberdeen.

Columbia College’s towers will overlook those former picnic grounds.

They will also overlook the first playing grounds for Hillfield Strathallen College. And a zoo, which was also located in the valley.

The valley exists in story, and it also exists in fact. Our infrastructure proves it. The valley is the reason why Longwood Road needs a bridge. And why Main St and King St need bridges. Until the King St bridge was built in the 1920s, the area to the west of the valley, namely all of Westdale, was relatively remote, hard to get to, and urban growth moved east from downtown.

So that “slope” is more than meets the eye. It’s loaded with civic meaning. And though the 403 makes it hard to appreciate, Chedoke Valley and Creek do remain an active, working part of Hamilton’s natural heritage.

Chedoke Creek usually flows in obscurity, with few people aware of it, though it hit the news this summer after the massive spill from the Combined Sewer Overflow that sent raw sewage into it. The CSO, incidentally, is also built into the slope of the valley.

The E.coli is not the creek's fault. Rather, the creek makes storm runoff possible in the first place for the west mountain suburbs. The six creeks in the Chedoke Watershed join together in the channel that runs beside the 403, all of them having come from the west Mountain, mostly buried underground there, as the primary watercourses for the storm drain system, then falling over the Niagara Escarpment, where they contribute to the city's waterfall count.

The spring, or source for Chedoke Creek itself lies between Upper James and West 5th Street, under Jameston Ave just north of the Linc. That spring was what first attracted the United Empire Loyalist, Michael Hess, to settle here with his family in 1789.

The spring and the creek flow entirely in pipes underground now, down Upper James, across Buchanan Park and along West 23rd through Coloquhoun Park, and over the escarpment, but it still drains the same area of its natural watershed. All those streets and parking lots, and most of the houses, contribute their rain runoff to it.

I'm saying all this because I want to give you the idea that the built geography of the city, the buildings and infrastructure, follows and depends upon the natural geography.

Chedoke Valley may be a remnant of what it was originally, but it still exists. It is still a valley, and a creek still runs through it. Together they remain a vital part of our living, working, natural heritage. And should be respected as such.

Personally, I don't want to see any more of Chedoke Valley filled in at all, by this or any other development. I think it's wrong. Enough is enough. In this, I agree entirely with Gord McNulty and the Hamilton Naturalist's Club. More public consultation is necessary.

And if this development is to go forward, then I would urge the city to require two things. One, that as little of the valley is filled-in as possible; and two, that the design of the project honour and respect its location on the lip of and overlooking the valley, that it have "two front doors," so to speak, one facing Main St, the other facing the 403, so that unlike for instance the Spectator and other buildings, it does not show its hind-end to us as we drive by.

Thank you.

Respectfully,
John Terpstra