

Pilon, Janet

Subject: Written Delegation for General Issues Committee, August 10, 2020.

From: "Graefe, Peter"

Date: Thursday, August 6, 2020 at 4:01 PM

To: "clerk@hamilton.ca" <clerk@hamilton.ca>

Subject: Written Delegation for General Issues Committee, August 10, 2020.

Mayor and Members of Council,

I am writing regarding the discussion of whether Hamilton City Council should support the bid team for the 2026 Commonwealth Games. To my mind, it is inappropriate to vote to move forward with supporting a bid at this time. A billion dollar plus project needs much greater discussion and debate in order to ensure the community accepts the risks involved and is enthusiastic about the project. To date, there has not been enough public information to make decisions on risk, and much less community enthusiasm compared to previous game bids.

Hosting a mega-event, even a lower-tier mega-event such as the Commonwealth Games, comes with a complex set of costs and benefits. The experiences of other cities shows that these events almost always lead to unanticipated costs and cost overruns, but rarely if ever to "benefit overruns". They almost always lead to inconveniences in residents' lives before and during the events, as well as long-term costs to be repaid by local residents. Indeed, I remember living in Montreal in the late 1990s as the ageing Olympic Stadium was finally paid off, and residents remarked, with some exaggeration, that they could have paved the streets with gold with the money that went to pay for the Olympics. The 2018 referendum in Calgary about hosting another Olympics speaks volumes about how citizens who have hosted a mega-event evaluated whether it is worthwhile: despite the hype and promises, a majority voted against making a bid.

The decision to make a bid should therefore be preceded by proper consultation, including the opportunity for citizens to scrutinize the expected costs and benefits. I note that there is next to no public information about what these costs and benefits are for the proposed bid. As I write, less than 24 hours before the last moment to make a public presentation on this issue, there is no useful information in the GIC documents that I can use to weigh the bid. Experience has taught us that bid promoters provide information that supports their bid. That is fair game. But it is also incumbent on Council to provide citizens an opportunity to discuss and debate their numbers, and to consider how complete and realistic they are. That takes time and transparency.

For instance, news reports suggest the bid group will argue that the games will put no pressure on the levy. At the same time, they seem to be asking for city land, funds from the Future Fund and staff time, to support their bid and ultimately the delivery of the games. Citizens should have an opportunity to learn more about how the opportunity cost of devoting staff time to the games (what part of that staff's regular work is not being done?) or of surrendering assets (which presumably could be used to produce other goods without putting pressure on the levy).

Yours truly,

Peter Graefe