

Addressing: General Issues Committee, March 29, 2021, item 8.1 - Municipal Comprehensive Review, and related issues.

March 25, 2021

Written Delegation

To: Mayor Eisenberger and all Members of Hamilton City Council

Dear Mayor and Members of City Council:

I am writing to ask you to delay all decisions relating to the Land Needs Assessment process and the expansion of the Hamilton city limits to accommodate the expected future expansion of the population of the city, and to reject the recommendations in item 8.1. The delay would afford the time to do a professional, credible, and responsible assessment of all future market demands, and the best available means to meet them. Such an assessment is necessary to fulfill the responsibility of your office and Council toward the present and future citizens of Hamilton and to the future of the City itself.

Briefly, my reasons for a delay are as follows:

1) The projections of the future market demand for new housing in Hamilton are based on a report that appears to use past growth to project future growth. This is an erroneous means of projecting future market demand, as has been well known for several decades. Where it was used in the past it led to flawed decisions, unmet emerging market demands, foreclosed opportunities for development, and to serious waste of taxpayers' funds and of market investments. And erroneous data and decisions have been subject to successful court challenges, and sometimes rejection of underway plans or other costly changes.

I will give but one immediate example of why past growth in demand for real estate cannot be used to project future market demands on which to plan for housing and associated infrastructure and services. The current generation of the province that is now entering adulthood and the more precarious job market is marrying at a significantly later age, and it is having children later in life than previous generations. Their market demand will be for single, and two-member family housing for a significant part of their active lives. This housing demand will not be met by single-family houses on newly urbanized land for families with children. It will require core and urban-center housing on already serviced grey lands. These may be larger condos with outside spaces, townhouses, or low-rise multi-dwellings with ample adult recreational facilities. This is what many developers today are talking about developing and investing in, a process accelerated by the pandemic. Hamilton is already promoting and investing in such housing.

A significant part of planning, infrastructure and servicing expenses funded by the city for future housing must be directed to these market demands. Tax dollars are limited, and existing and ongoing suburban development has already placed high financial burdens on the city for maintaining and servicing suburban areas with city finances. Expanding those areas dramatically will drain city resources from other needs and market demands, as well as further indebt the city.

It is surprising for city planners to present to Council a plan based on data that is erroneous, without at least indicating the inadequacies, and evaluating the consequences of making decisions based on those data. And it would be irresponsible of Council to proceed to discuss such a plan without such

considerations. And irresponsible as well as to use such a plan as a basis for its decisions that will shape the future development and possibilities of the city for decades.

2) Given that the market projections of housing demand presented to and used by the city planners and Council are not up to the best current practice, a serious consultation and review process guided by Council's needs for information and responsible decision-making should be instituted.

The consultation process to date has been mis-informative, and not widely accessible to a broad diversity of affected organizations or interested citizens. The consultation to date compounds and obscures the failures in the processes that have occurred so far. Council needs to take greater control and responsibility for what is happening in this planning process.

The consultation process to date does not serve the city because it does not consider the diverse market options the city needs to develop and to offer to future citizens, and to organizations that will be considering whether to make Hamilton part of their future – both market-based organizations and other potential future employers.

If the full range of interests and needs of Hamilton's citizens and developers is to be considered, it will require at minimum, a meaningful, informed, and appropriately extended time frame for significant public participation and for interested parties involved in all forms of development to be involved in a consultation process. A broadened and properly facilitated consultation can identify for city planners and Council both needs and market demands that have been overlooked in the present data and the planning process to date. It will also acknowledge wider social and environmental concerns.

I strongly urge you Mr. Mayor and Council to extend and develop the consultation, and to make it an effective process that can address the diverse futures of the city, before reaching any decisions about land needs. No single group or interest should be allowed to prevail to the exclusion of other groups, those with other market interests or those with other future contributions to make to the development of Hamilton.

Erroneous data, faulty planning and failed and exclusionary consultation should not be allowed to take the place of responsible action by Mayor and Council.

Sincerely,

[signed]

Harvey A. Feit, PhD, FRSC
Professor Emeritus of Anthropology
Hamilton