

From: L. Christine Shepherd
Sent: March 25, 2021 9:54 PM
To: clerk@hamilton.ca
Subject: Municipal Comprehensive Review and GRIDS2

To the Mayor and members of Hamilton City Council

Re: Municipal Comprehensive Review and GRIDS2

The Hamilton 350 Committee works for real action on climate change. You are now facing an absolutely critical climate decision that will determine whether council actually believes there is a climate emergency and is prepared to act effectively to address that emergency. We urge you to recognize and act decisively to ensure that greenhouse gas emissions from Hamilton are reduced as rapidly as possible, and that additional measures are taken to make our city resilient in the face of the climatic changes ahead and already evident.

The crossroads Hamilton is at is whether to finally protect the city's remaining foodlands and natural areas by freezing the urban boundary. The current provincial government is trying to force municipalities to make decisions by 2022 on how they will accommodate provincial population and job growth projections for the next THIRTY years. These long range projections carry great uncertainty and are premature for planning purposes. In the past two years the current provincial government has torn up or seriously modified almost all the growth planning rules to ensure that so-called independent municipal governments make decisions that it wants.

It is clear that their intent is to force a massive expansion of municipal boundaries onto rural foodlands and natural areas for the pleasure and profit of land speculators and developers. It is literally a crime against present and future generations to decree – as the Ford government has done – that planning for growth must NOT consider climate implications, food security or other aspects of sustainability.

The situation created by the Ford government is bizarre. Never before have municipalities been required to plan 30 years into the future. Never before have they been forced to actually expand their urban area decades before there is any indication that the predicted growth will actually occur. Never before have the features of that growth, the economic landscape, and the likely commuting patterns in the wake of the pandemic been so uncertain. And never before have so many parts of the planning system been turned on their heads or so obviously distorted in favour of private profit and against the public good.

Further expansion of Hamilton's boundaries is completely incompatible with council's declaration of a climate emergency. As Ontario's recent Environmental Commissioner fired by the Ford administration has stated many times, "urban sprawl is the tar sands of Ontario". Submission to more sprawl development increases greenhouse gas emissions and further compromises city finances. More loss of Hamilton's foodlands clearly compromises our fragile food security. Replacement of rural lands with urbanization inevitably makes us more vulnerable to the stormwater runoff and flooding that comes with the increasingly extreme weather we face. More sprawl means an even weaker transit system as well as more single occupancy vehicle travel and an increasingly congested road system. Urbanization also reduces the plant life that helps to absorb greenhouse gases.

We understand some of you recognize that effective public consultation and engagement on the plans for Hamilton's next thirty years is effectively not possible during the pandemic lockdowns.

So many people are being excluded from opportunities to provide their views on these critical questions. That exclusion has been made much worse by the decision of your planning department to exclude a fixed urban boundary from the possible options on which it has tried to obtain comments. This appears to be a sad and beaten reaction to the provincial rule changes, but nevertheless it is completely unacceptable – a clear abandonment of the city's written commitments to public engagement.

The Hamilton 350 Committee recognizes that the time is very late for humans to minimize climatic disruption and additional catastrophic consequences. We are eager for city council to be our allies in doing everything possible to cut emissions and to build a resilient, just and inclusive community. We hope you are just as committed.