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From: William Farkas

Sent: Tuesday, November 9, 2021 3:58 PM

To: clerk@hamilton.ca

Subject: UB Expansion into farmland

Clerk City Clerk,

Its pretty obvious that humanity is rapidly approaching a crisis of profound change. Change in the weather, change in science. Less obvious but just as real is the opportunity this change will bring. The world is transforming in real time. The weather is changing just as quickly as AI is moving into our lives. It's as if the future has broken lose and is running pell mell towards us. Anyone who says we have "been here before" is not just wrong, they're dangerous, because they lure us into apathy just as the storm is hitting.

Over the next few decades, every country, community and individual will have to take one of three options.

There will be some who are early adapters, those who stood on a rock with their eyes open and had the character to face the winds of change. There will be many more "late adapters", who lost their way and finally lifted their eyes and followed the leaders out. And then the there will be the losers, the ones who didn't or couldn't adapt at all. Yuval Harari describes this well in his book Homo Dias.

Going about the city I am sure we have seen the lawn signs calling for an end to urban expansion. They're still out there long after the survey is over. On the other hand, you don't see a single lawn sign supporting expansion into farmland... not one. In fact the very thought of a "support the sprawl" lawn sign is actually laughable except maybe on the bumper of a late model luxury SUV. Yet despite the clear will of the majority of citizens the sprawl zombie continues to devour our farmland. Some of the best Farmland in the whole country. Sprawl, like deforestation, is a golden goose, being choked to death by developers, land speculators, and banks that refuse to examine the morality of what they are doing. For the sake of our own mental well being not to mention our very survival we have to stop this dim slouching thing from any more damage.

The Ambitious Density option is such a thing, an institutional relic from another age, from the carbon era. Here are some rhetorical statements meant to expose the dated logic of the Ambitious Density (AD) option which targets 13 square kilometers of Hamilton farmland for paving.

1. Given that Hamilton has declared a climate emergency and has committed to being carbon neutral by 2050, these factors have (as they should) strongly influenced the Ambitious Density expansion option. No. Greenwash is plentiful yes. Serious consideration of carbon neutrality is a big zero.
2. Sprawl is recognized as a major factor in rising carbon emissions. Yes
3. Increasing urban density requires commitment, consultation, vision and long term planning which Hamilton has done – Absolutely Not. Witness most recently that something as preliminary as a map of Underused Areas in the Core was not done by the city, it was done by SSHO volunteers

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4. Ambitious density will open up approximately 13 square (1340 ha) kilometers of far
5. If “Ambitious Density” had been truly ambitious it would have had no farmland expansion whatsoever
6. The NO Urban Boundary expansion option was not considered by city staff because it failed to satisfy the Ford government’s mandates for “market assessment” and “city growth”, both of which, in the light of the climate emergency, are rear view metrics. Yes. Land Use Policy is being driven by obsolete regulations.
7. Though the authors of Ambitious Density option passed the “blame buck” to the Ford government their sorry surrender to expansion suggests indifference if not complicity. We need to give space to some mission driven planners at city hall.
8. Sprawl is sustainable. By definition. No
9. Sprawl incentivizes the kind of innovation in housing and livability that this planet demands. No
10. Sprawl is superior to densification for incubating “local” business. No
11. Sprawl opens more opportunities for local food producers and thus reduces our dependency on foreign imports. No. We can’t grow chickens milk cows or tomatoes in concrete.
12. Sprawl wrecks wetlands, watersheds and groundwater resources further stressing the great lakes. Obviously
13. Sprawl contributes to the beauty and discoverability of a city which increases tourism potential. No
14. Sprawl gives our children more opportunity to appreciate and explore nature. No
15. Sprawl is visionary, creative, forward thinking and a magnet for post carbon age innovators. No
16. Sprawl increases the urban heating effect.
17. Sprawl helps to cool the housing market. No proof.
18. The authors of Ambitions Density suggest that this will be the last expansion and their credibility on the matter is impeccable. Sure.
19. Enlightened urban planning still recognizes that sprawl has a place in the growth of our large cities. No
20. When surveyed the people of Hamilton voted 90% against sprawl even though it was spun as “Ambitious Density”. Yes.
21. Those who champion this Ambitious Density plan – the developers, land speculators, government bureaucrats who folded to the lobbyists - will commit to a community service of bringing their message of sprawl to the youth of Hamilton to help quell their rising despair that the earth dying while the grownups fiddle.

What would Greta Thunberg say if she saw the Ambitious Density option?

She would look at this, curl her lips in disgust and say this is the same Blah, Blah, Blah they are using to justify burning the Amazon or clearcutting the rainforests.

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If science is right – and I suspect there are fewer and fewer deniers – everything starts to really come apart in an ugly exponential lift off over the next 2 or 3 decades – the exact time frame that this AD sprawl will go forward. All of us could easily live to witness its full destructiveness. It's that close. Our kids and grand kids will live their lives in it. It's a certainty that there will be large scale human trauma from the impacts of global warming and environmental collapse. As nature "re-wilds" and humanity recognizes the true consequences of its actions the carbon age will draw to a shuddering end. Urban sprawl will be as dead as racism or homophobia are today. Dumping greenhouse gasses into the atmosphere will be illegal, immoral and punishable. Consider yourself a fogey brain if you can't see that yet.

But somebody up there is smiling on us. There is another exponential curve, a good one. Science and tech are also exponentially lifting off the launch pad. An energy revolution will bring unprecedented economic prosperity especially to the early adapters. That has to be Hamilton. Let's start by not expanding the urban boundary and committing to creative densification including brown space development. To hell with the antediluvian provincial guidelines. Let's really be ambitious by accommodating projected population growth within our existing developed core. Give our city planners a mission to be proud of and make Hamilton a leader in this inevitable post carbon era.

William Farkas

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