

Pilon, Janet

Subject: Sprawl

From: Gary Aikema
Sent: September 16, 2023 10:01 AM
To: clerk@hamilton.ca
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I attended the planning meeting at the Ancaster fair grounds on the 14th. Outside the building a demonstration was being held which would set the stage for the 156 delegations making presentations. The story was repeated over and over again about loss of farmland, species at risk and a plethora of environmental issues. I left after a few hours because those opposing the Greenbelt changes had basically stacked the meeting.

My background is building construction (now retired). I am no big fan of developers as the way they commandeered the development sector. I was a builder that just wanted to build custom homes for people in a one on one relationship. This worked ok until the 90's. Trying to find land to develop and build had become much more difficult. Going through the process was becoming extremely complex, time consuming and costly. Large developers and builders have the expertise to deal with all this and had an inside track with staff at city hall. As a result I continued building but on infill singles and renovations.

I did one small development of 7 lots which took 4 years and a lot of aggravation.

My take on what is happening with the Greenbelt is inevitable. When the Greenbelt was established I was very much against it as I could see scenarios just like what is happening now. The Greenbelt was but a few years old when the same government that created it started gerrymandering the arbitrary boundaries little bits at a time.

The area between the Greenbelt and existing urban area is in a great part owned by developers and investors. Property is normal taxed a market valuation. There is an exemption for farm land which is taxed at 25%. Developers had it in their best interest to rent the land to farmers. Farmers were very happy about this arrangement because they could farm large tracts of land at a very reasonable price.

We have created a scenario where developer/investors with deep pockets can sit on land and watch the value of their investment grow at rate far exceeding inflation. When the market conditions are right and it is advantageous to develop and build they will do so. With building cost and high mortgage rates there is not a viable option to build. Now we have a problem. We badly need places for people to live.

The city of Hamilton against the original proposal of the planning department chose not to expand the urban boundary. Now the only place left to build is within the existing urban boundary. This is not happening. Why? NIMBYism seems to play a big role in this. Reading the paper I see many proposals from builders and then local residents complaining about the density and builders need density to make the project viable. Higher densities decrease costs and competition will see to it that profits are kept in line. If there is not enough competition profits will be higher. The hurdles of getting through city hall to obtain building permits and paying \$72,000 in development charges for semis and SFD's and \$39,000 for higher density buildings is a big problem.

A simple building permit can take forever to process with endless back and forth juggling over picky little issues. First needing planning approval before applying. Then being told you need a site plan, an OLS survey and drainage plan for the simplest job or fall into the trap of heritage designation. Then needing to deal with Conservation Authorities which can take months. Sometimes it takes a year or more to obtain a permit.

To circumvent this builders are taking huge swaths of farmland outside the Greenbelt and turning them into subdivisions. Just take a short drive through the Greenbelt and witness this. Caledonia, Brantford, Fergus, Waterford and virtually all small towns and villages are experiencing construction eating up farm land. Land is much cheaper there and maybe the approval process much easier. This farmland is better or equal than the farmland in the Greenbelt and contiguous with other huge swaths of farm lands making farming more efficient for processing product.

The best farmland on Ontario is already gone. I grew up in Burlington and in the sixties worked on market garden farms that had fantastic growing conditions. These lands are now covered with malls and houses. Why? Because people needed places to live. Those few acres of Greenbelt, much of it not being farmed are not going to make any difference to "local" food production. Land on the other side of the Greenbelt is still local and disappearing at an accelerated pace.

The Netherlands a country with less than half the land area of southern Ontario exports over 100 billion dollars of agricultural products whereas all of Canada exports just over \$50 billion. Southern Ontario has more farm land than the total land mass of the Netherlands. Why is food security constantly brought up when it really not an issue.

Premier Ford sees the big picture and has taken action to deal with his problem off of housing newcomers and existing residents. One way take land out of the Greenbelt near existing urban area add more than taken out outside the Greenbelt so there is actually more land in the Greenbelt now. The land removed from the Greenbelt now had a caveat attached that it must be built on rapidly or it reverts back to Greenbelt. I doubt this will happen because the city will still be the stick in the mud unless further legislation comes down to stop this. Now, what shenanigans went on in determining who benefited from this I don't know. It seems a lot of people are convinced Ford is a liar and has developer cronies that he is giving a big gift. I would hope people could be a little more careful about what they say about elected officials in public.

I say all this as I sit in my home in the middle of the Greenbelt where I have nice forests and farmland around me and am protected from value of my hectare of property being devalued because a 30 story apartment is going up next door.

BTW there is plenty of protection of the natural environment in place currently to prevent these areas from development. There are ESA's, PSA's, Niagara Escarpment Commission, Conservation Authorities and other regulatory devices that prevent development on those lands.

There is no such thing as affordable new built housing in Hamilton. Land costs and soft cost have gone through the roof let alone building costs. In the 1950's when my dad as an immigrant built our home land and soft costs were 10% of the cost, now it well over 50%.

I have been involved with a refugee family of 8, the parents originally from Congo. They fled Congo as teenagers because of tribal conflict and family members being killed. They fled to Zambia and met in the Meheba refugee camp married and had five children. A much younger sister of Marta also is a member of the family.

On Thursday afternoon as I sat down with Douglas and Marta and some of the kids in the home we rented for them in the Willson Victoria area. We were discussing a way forward with employment. I looked out the front window and asked Douglas what happened to the two tents that were in the small park across the street. He said the police came and forced the occupants to leave. Then he mentioned that on Tuesday the children came home from the Edgar Davie school. They were somewhat upset. They had witnessed two homeless people violently attacking each other. The kindergartener was reluctant to go to school the next day. This in the first week in school in Canada. Something they never experienced in the refugee camp.

We need to provide, for everyone, a safe place to live, including the homeless. The cost of housing is unaffordable to many. Cost of land in Hamilton, driven by artificial boundaries, is absurd along with regulations and long wait times for permits are major causes for high prices.

Sent from my iPhone
Gary Aikema