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June 5, 2023

Brian McHattie
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Re: Proposed Airport Business Park Warehouse Development

To all Councillors and the Mayor:

Thank you for carefully considering all of the feedback and background materials on this proposed development – not an straight-forward effort. It sounds like the first of four warehouse buildings with other developments in the Airport Business Park to come - taking the time to interpret what the “Eco-Business Park” really means is important.

The principle of development has been set for the Airport Employment lands as has been the commitment to an eco-industrial park. That means that this is a different sort of business park than we are used to developing. Fundamentally it allows us to inject a high degree of science and creativity into the process; creating employment while protecting biodiversity and ensuring sustainability in the buildings and surrounding landscape, always with our climate change commitments in mind.

You are working in a very different context than I did when on Council just nine years ago. The COP 15 Convention on Biological Diversity agreement signed in Montreal in December 2022 provides Canada with a special responsibility to reverse the catastrophic 6th Mass Extinction currently underway. The recent 6th report of the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) warns that it is likely now that we will blow past the Paris target of limiting warming to 1.5 degrees C with fearsome impacts in the offing – the current rise in spring forest fires right across Canada is concerning. I don't know if you've noticed but the strangely hazy orange sun at the end of as Hamilton day tell us that the smoke of the forest fires is here with us too.

We also continue to lose wetlands at an alarming rate: over 75% of wetlands in southern Ontario have been lost and over 90% of wetlands in Hamilton Harbour have been removed (Trent University Professor Tom Whillans' research tells us that Hamilton Harbour was the largest commercial fishery on Lake Ontario in the 1890s).

As co-author of the 1997 Environment Canada “How Much Habitat is Enough” report (now in the third edition) I can tell you that it advises Great Lakes Areas of Concern like Hamilton that landscapes need at least 10% of their lands in wetland cover, and at minimum at least 6% wetland cover in any specific sub-watershed in order to preserve ecological function. The report also calls for 30% forest cover. We are not close to meeting those targets in the 20 Mile Creek watershed and therefore protecting this forest and wetland habitat and the functions it serves is critical.

As an aside, I used to be told: Councillor McHattie we need a balance between the economy and the environment – I always used to scratch my head wondering how we can lose more habitat to development in a world where we have lost 75% of wetlands already!

What sort of development we will design and approve in Hamilton in response? The exciting part is the opportunity to put details into the Eco-Business Park planning. We can use this warehouse development as a case study by developing and applying detailed Eco-Business Park policies:

- Protect mature trees on the site by moving the parking lot to another location. All applications say they will plant new trees for those lost but we know how long trees take to grow and we simply do not have the time now.
- Ensure that ecological corridors to and from the forest and the wetland are maintained to ensure habitats remain functional, that is they serve the ecological functions of wildlife habitat that we are learning about through the \$3.5M Parks Canada grant to the Cootes to Escarpment Eco-Park.
- Protect the Provincially Significant Wetland by asking that the developer transfer ownership to the City following the lead of the City of Brampton. Wetlands provide ecological services including water storage, retention, filtration while serving as critical wildlife habitat for a number of species (cite Dougan report for which ones)
- Much is made about securing a buffer from development – 30 m has been suggested but what is this meant to achieve in practice? The “How Much Habitat is Enough” report referred to above contains a science-based review of buffer widths and the ecological functions they maintain.

At this point I should interject that I am now back on the Hamilton Naturalist Club (HNC) Board of Directors. Last week we voted to offer to co-manage the provincially significant wetland with the City of Hamilton.

As you know the HNC and the City have a long history of working together on biodiversity starting with the 1993 Natural Areas Inventory (NAI), followed by additional NAIs in 2003, 2013 and through your recent Council motion another NAI slated to start this year. We are currently working together on the Hamilton Biodiversity Action Plan and completing the Eco-Business Park planning policies is surely part of this work. Dragging you back into history it is cool to note that the Hamilton Parks Board led by Mr. McQuesten worked with the HNC’s predecessor the Hamilton Bird Protection Site to conserve Cootes Paradise as a sanctuary in 1927. In short, the HNC is here to help.

So, my kindly request to you:

1. Fill in the details of the Eco-Business Park criteria using science and creativity.
2. Ensure that no trees are lost (remember all of the carbon that is stored in those trees and the wildlife habitat they provide drives biodiversity) – yes a parking lot is required

but there is enough land to accomplish an “And” approach – biodiversity, carbon storage and parking.

3. Acquire the wetland and wildlife corridor through the development process and secure a co-management agreement with the HNC who already steward 10 nature sanctuaries in the Hamilton area

Sorry for the length of my letter – it has been nine years since I’ve intervened and had a bit stored up!

Yours respectfully,

Brian McHattie

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