

Delegation on Downtown OP Options

December 5th 2019

Roland Tanner on behalf of ECoB.

I am delegating today on behalf of Engaged Citizens of Burlington. Engaged Citizens of Burlington is a registered non-profit organisation with over 600 signed up supporters, a growing percentage of whom are paid members. We advocate on behalf of the proper recognition of residents' preferred solutions in all municipal matters, in favour of a stronger role for residents' voices generally, and in favour of the reform of the province's relationship with municipal government.

That's the same phrase I've used to start the last three or four delegations I've made here. I say it because not everybody in the audience knows what ECoB is, and also to counter the criticism of ECoB made since its early days, and still made frequently on Twitter: namely, that we are a group of angry, unrepresentative and entitled NIMBY's who represent nothing but selfishness.

We exist because the voices of residents have historically had a hard time being heard at City Hall over the last decade or so, and still need all the help they can get in working, hopefully collaboratively, with City Hall.

But that's not the same thing as saying 'what residents want to happen has to happen'. What residents want can only 'happen' if it's legal. But Council *can* insist on Official Plan that's ignores the wider planning context, if it wants. It has that right. I suspect that's the subtext of today's debate, rather than the two options actually on the table. Should council send these options back to staff for a third time and demand options that reflect what residents want? Or is there another approach that could work?

So I'm not going to do what once would have been expected from ECoB and shake my fist and say that the options presented by staff are an outrage that ignores residents. I'm also not here to capitulate and say this represents a reasonable compromise with the public vision for downtown and we simply have to put up with it. It's not and we don't. Downtown's future should reflect the vision of Burlingtonians. Period. Nobody in this room should have a problem with that. The only question is, how do we get there?

I believe we have two options presented by staff which are a good faith attempt to do what they can to deliver a compromise between what residents want and what is defensible at LPAT. But those options were never going to be popular or reflect the entirety of what residents want. That was very clearly signalled by staff throughout this review. They feel it would be professionally unacceptable to draft a plan that's inconsistent with the provincial framework.

Why do they believe this? Because of the Urban Growth Centre. That's the root cause of this entire debate. Regardless of population targets and minimum densities and all the rest of it, while the Urban Growth Centre is in place downtown we are going to get proposals for highrises, and LPAT is going to approve them. That Urban Growth Centre was put in place with little or no consultation, and absolutely no foresight in 2007. The then director of planning was proud that Burlington was the first city in the GTHA to do so. In retrospect it seems like we were first because nobody on that council was paying attention. But that decision informs everything happening now. Everything comes back to the Urban Growth Centre.

So Council has a choice to make, and very little time to make it. The choice is - either, ONE reject both these options and ask the planning staff for a third time to reconsider their proposals for downtown. Or TWO let these options go forward, acknowledging that this is not what residents want, and not what many feel they have the right to expect, but recognising that if we're actually going to win this battle for a downtown residents like, it's not going to be the OP that delivers it.

If Council asks staff to think again, if that's being considered, what will happen? It will mean more delays, with no particular guarantee that staff will even then come back with options that anybody likes. And I presume it will mean the Interim Control Bylaw will be extended, possibly for up to another year. If that happens, my understanding is that council remains unable to address the Anchor Mobility Hub at the John St Bus shelter or the Urban Growth Centre. Everything that has a chance of definitively getting control of downtown remains on hold.

Meanwhile development applications keep coming in. And they keep getting taller. And while the ICBL is in place the clock keeps ticking on applications, which means those applications are going straight to LPAT for non-response by council. Far from controlling the decisions on those developments, Council is handing them over to LPAT without trying to use the tools at its disposal to achieve moderation. Those developments are not coming back to you. LPAT will make the call. I freely admit that if I was sitting where you're sitting I would have voted for the ICBL. I have no doubt. But right about now as I see developments being appealed to LPAT for non-response I'd be wondering if I'd made a mistake. I hope I'd have had the courage to change my mind rather than doubling down.

If in contrast Council takes these options and goes ahead with them as the basis for an imperfect OP for downtown, what will happen? The ICBL will be lifted. The city can, we believe, remove the Mobility Hub and leave central Burlington with one perfectly logical transit hub, taking one tool away from developers. The city can start making decisions on the developments coming before it, and residents need you to do that work. The city can begin lobbying the province for help with the Urban Growth Centre.

Yes, we know it will not be easy, and there are numerous hurdles to achieving it. But council has something very powerful in its pocket - votes in a marginal riding. We live in a must-win

riding for any provincial government, and the current government is on the wrong side of the biggest political issue in our city for this or many generations.

In that context who can say even this pro-development provincial government won't be willing to listen?

This is EcoB's position right now. Complete this process as soon as possible and get onto the policies which address where the real power lies. Residents ultimately don't care about a perfect Official Plan. They care about their downtown, and they want to see a council that is doing everything in it's power to address the the many things which are currently taking their downtown away from them.

And if, finally, the Urban Growth Centre can be addressed and placed where it makes sense - where Burlington's transit already exists and growth is already being focused - could we not then return to the OP and revise it to reflect the new tools that the city holds?