

Submission to Regional Council Special Meeting, May 17, 2023

The version of the Durham Region Official Plan before Council this week is a critically flawed plan that fails to effectively promote the worthy goals expressed in the Envision Durham process.

Council should decline to approve this document and should send it back to the planning department for substantial changes.

The issue of overriding importance is that this plan greenlights the continuing conversion of large tracts of farmland into mid- and low-density sprawl.

It is easy to understand why the big developer lobby supports a major expansion of urban boundaries by Regional Council, just as it is easy to understand why the big developer lobby supports the attack on the Greenbelt by Premier Ford. This continuation of business-as-usual plays to the strengths and interests of big development corporations: the conversion of greenfield land into edge-area subdivisions of hundreds of cookie-cutter homes at a time.

But what is good for big developers is not good for the citizens of Durham Region. This model of development is a proven failure at providing affordable housing. This model fails to create communities where public transit can be provided efficiently and with sufficient frequency. This model fails to provide communities where people can safely access many jobs and services by walking or cycling. Instead, this model provides very expensive housing, in which average families must stretch their budgets to own two or more cars.

This model fails to safeguard the precious farmland which is becoming more important every year for our communities' food security. This model fails to safeguard our wetlands, woodlands, and the biodiversity which we should be protecting for our children and their children.

Rather than promoting climate resiliency, this plan will have the opposite effect. Far-flung, car-dependent neighbourhoods will make it more challenging to rapidly reduce carbon emissions. The increase in paved area will add to the urban heat island effect when the weather is hot, and will worsen the rapid runoff of rainfall, flushing pollution into our waterways and increasing flood risks.

The model fails, too, on the grounds of fiscal sustainability. With continuing sprawl, municipal budgets will need to expand year by year to cover the expanding maintenance costs and eventually the replacement costs of more infrastructure. Taxpayers are waking up to shocks of climbing taxes attributable to Bill 23, but that is just a taste of things to come as the bills for continued sprawl come due.

There are many worthy goals expressed in this version of the Official Plan. Those goals include:

- “• Meeting our shared obligations to address the impacts of a changing climate and protect the natural environment;
- Satisfying a growing demand for sustainable alternatives to the personal vehicle for mobility, such as active transportation and public transit options;
- Using land efficiently, optimizing services and infrastructure, and focusing efforts on intensification within existing communities;
- Taking strides to further support the agricultural sector” (page 10)

I would like to believe, as I'm sure you would too, that our planning process in coming years will effectively support the realization of those goals. As it stands now, however, this plan effectively sabotages its own worthy goals through an expansionary land allocation.

For the sake of affordable housing, for the sake of our environment, for the sake of the health and wellbeing of the next generations, I ask you to say no to the version of the Official Plan that is before you this week.

– Bart Hawkins Kreps, Clarington