

Making the Climate Crisis Response Strategy Effective, Concrete and Credible: The Centrality of the Official Plan Review

A Presentation to the Committee of the Whole, City of Guelph

December 6, 2021

To effectively implement the motion before the City (*Cities Race to Zero Motion, December 6, 2021*), and to sustain the health, security and welfare of our community, we all must acknowledge and act upon the centrality of the current Official Plan Review. This review might well be *the* pivotal undertaking in our city's future. This particular motion and the OP Review present a unique opportunity in timing and intent.

What we build, how we build it, and where we build it, determines almost everything else in the survival formula for cities.

The *where*, the spatial location of land uses and associated activities is central. So, where housing, commercial offices, factories, parks, schools, and all other land uses will be, will determine the types and configurations of all infrastructure networks, from transit, energy, broadband and water lines, to sewers, roads and sidewalks, bridges and everything else.

I think this logical connection is self-evident to everyone.

How we build these components of our urban community is also pivotal. How we mix the uses, how we chose densities, what construction and building materials we use, what insulation and energy efficiency levels we chose, what building and site design standards we set, and so on, will be major determinant in our prospects.

So, the Official Plan Review is a pivotal juncture in our community's future wellbeing.

If through this Official Plan Review we design and build our city as if it is essentially "business as usual" - then I would say, "Don't waste your time, and everyone else's time with this motion".

If through this review we design and continue building our city as essentially a little different, a little denser perhaps, a little more "big city" like, than the current Official Plan - again, I would say, "Don't bother with this motion, avoid the charade."

But, if we recognize that we are in fact going through a paradigmatic shift in our existence, one largely driven by the climate crisis that we have brought upon ourselves, then we have to commit to a radical shift in the way we design and re-design our city. Through the passage of events and those quickly coming our way, the statutory term "Review" has in fact been made redundant. What is required is a reformulation, a comprehensive reconfiguration of our urban place.

A paradigmatic shift in the way we live on this planet is already upon us. Related shifts are happening in the knowledge economy, in the convergence of the digital and biological sciences, in the burgeoning Green Economy, in the “fit” between the so-called circular economy and these various realities, and in many other dimensions of our changing world. The design and built form of our city must connect and integrate with these new and emergent realities. If not, we will wither on the vine; redundant, stuck in the last paradigm, missing the opportunities for prosperity and wellbeing.

Provincial legislation sets mid-22 as the reporting benchmark for our Official Plan Review. So, we have here our first, tangible step in what this motion advocates. And it is very timely. It allows for a public reporting on concrete and relevant steps in the new path toward community sustainability. We must reach for it. As this motion advocates, communicate to the growing urban community your vision of a designed and re-designed urban place that responds positively and creatively to the challenges of the climate crisis and sustainability. The existential imperative is by now obvious to everyone, and compelling. What this motion calls for, and what an innovative Official Plan Review presents, is a fortuitous and strategic convergence of two complementary initiatives. I encourage you to grasp the opportunity.

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