

Mr. Mayor and Members of Council:

As you may be aware, and as you will certainly see from recent correspondence and depositions to the City, Guelph is currently deficient in public parkland, and this situation is very likely to be exacerbated over the next several decades.

This requires and must have your immediate attention.

Parklands, of all sorts, play a vital array of functions in a growing urban community. These range from play spaces for children, relaxing walks for families, friends and others, community events, sporting occasions, the provision of green "lungs" for the expanding city's population, and mental and emotional relief for many in an increasing manic world, to natural spaces for ecological health, corridors for wildlife, water purification spaces, aesthetic opportunities and delight, assorted community plots and local food systems, buffers between increasingly intensive buildings and physical infrastructure, vital links between neighbourhoods, and many other vital functions.

For a rapidly growing urban community that within the life of a tree is heading toward a quarter of a million people, our parklands are pivotally important elements in a sustainable city. We are intensifying our urban fabric, with good reason, much of it to do with our very survival. A complementary component of this new urban fabric are our parklands. They are vital and will become even more vital as the nature of our city changes. They are and will be vital for safe, enjoyable and socially functional neighbourhoods. They are and will be vital for the health and wellbeing of the city as a whole.

We now know that they are and increasingly will be central considerations in our city's competitive standing in the urban economic marketplace, and the knowledge-based information economy. It is now documented, researched and unequivocally demonstrated that the quality of place is a pivotal factor in the location of many economic activities, especially those associated with the high tech sector, biotechnologies, the ever-expanding digital economy, and a globally mobile labour force in a technologically footloose economy. The new businesses are looking for new addresses. Not industrial parks, not strip malls, not conventional corporate towers. They are looking for character and quality of place. Something that speaks to their uniqueness, their individuality, their urbanity.

Healthy places, green spaces, diverse recreational opportunities, exercising and wellness opportunities, unique cultural spaces, art galleries, "foodie" places, and so on, are now combined with research centres, the best of communications infrastructure, housing diversity, and access to international air travel, as some of the key ingredients for businesses in the information/knowledge economy. We are not there if we cannot offer the very best of healthy, diverse and attractive living and working environments. And parklands, of all sorts, are pivotal here. This is fact, just as rail spurs, surplus water, cheap labour, low taxes, and other factors were the locational ingredients of an earlier age.

For social welfare, for community health, for social justice, for our ecological responsibilities, for the quality of our urban life, and for our economic viability, parklands must be a priority investment. Our City must attend to this now. We are far behind, and demonstrably losing ground.

We need policy changes. We need changes in practice (e.g. working with the development sector). We need vision and foresight in this vital matter.

It is my hope and expectation that at the City Council meeting of April 13, 2022, my City Council will amend the record of neglect and "second best", and commit to turning a new leaf on this critical matter.

Thank you for your attention.

David J.A. Douglas