

Captured from the Stop Sprawl Durham delegation to Durham Regional Council on May 17, 2023, regarding the proposed Regional Official Plan.

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At Stop Sprawl Durham, our coalition of concerned citizens was formed to advance a conversation around the benefits of density. To help convince our neighbours and networks that intensification is not a bad word. And in turn, to resist the push to sprawl into farmland and natural heritage areas. At our core is the understanding that the whitebelt is an integral part of the Ontario Agricultural System, and a grand opportunity to accelerate urgent carbon sequestration. The whitebelt is not a blank slate awaiting rooftops and pavement.

Our clear requests for municipal government are on the front page of our website for all to see:

- 1. safe walkable, bikeable communities**
- 2. Growing inward first and use current growth areas efficiently**
- 3. Improving transit**
- 4. Building affordable housing where a car-free lifestyle *is possible***
- 5. Protecting and improving the health of our lakes and rivers**
- 6. Preventing our trees canopy from being compromised**
- 7. Conserving farmland for food and carbon sequestration**
- 8. Protecting us from flooding and climate disasters**
- 9. Helping all of us prepare for a net-zero-carbon world**

Today we are here asking you to: **reject the massive quantity of urban expansion proposed in this Official Plan.** Why? Because sprawl undermines complete communities and will not help advance the healthy priorities we advocate for.

If Durham Regional Council needs a new reason to justify sober second thoughts about this quantity of urban expansion, it's the Province's newly proposed Bill 97 which once again changes the rules of the game for you and your planning teams. If the Official Plan is approved as is today, and as exemplified by how vulnerable many of you are to developer-affiliated dollars, Durham is on track to have sprawl take it ALL in short order. BILD knows that [Bill 97](#) contains a provision to expand urban boundaries *without* a municipal comprehensive review. They are primed to take more. Do you truly understand the implications of that? The floodgates will be open.

You could safely reject the roughly 9,000 acre push outwards, keep the urban boundary intact for now, and Bill 97 should give you the opportunity to do incremental assessments and expand in smaller more iterative amounts that are responsive to forecasts and finances, and dare I add, progress on emissions targets. Recall in the Submissions Summary document it states: "[Staff do not expect any of the Urban Expansion Areas identified in the ROP to develop before 2031](#)" (page 98). Therefore, you have time to refine this, you have plenty of land already designated for growth, plus you have the new Greenbelt parcels that Queen's Park dumped in your lap to sort out. And in late breaking news, you now have a new letter from Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing and Chief Planner Bridgeman's associated memo to consider today.

Let's be real, if new sprawl was working for us, taxes would be lower, homes would already be more affordable, and traffic wouldn't be a constant topic of conversation and grievance. But that's not what's playing out, *and you know it.*

We have encouraged a lot of letter-writing to you and Envision Durham staff. Some of you have replied graciously to our letters. Others have fought back with mistruths and spin. Many of you have justified using this massive amount of whitebelt because much of the prime farmland is owned by speculators who seem owed their turn to develop. *You* are not responsible for the maximization of their profits. *You* are responsible to the constituents who elected you. *You* are also responsible for the Region's low-carbon pathway, which is advanced by keeping communities compact and by improving and increasing the number of carbon sinks within our region. Farmland can do that for us under the right stewardship.

Envision Durham was a multi-year referendum on how we see our shared future. A great number of Durham residents asked for a new approach to growth. We asked for the tap of new land to be turned off because sprawl had reached a tipping point, and we understood that more of the same was not going to solve the problems we were facing. We asked you to run out the clock on the sprawl that had already been locked in for many decades. During this referendum, we learned (once again) that our voices and votes were worth less than the building and land developers' lobby.

Our last point is this. **We do not accept this colossal amount of land for a type of growth that will bankrupt our future, lock in harmful climate**

**impacts, and do little to make life more affordable for the people of Durham Region.** It's time to put the current and future citizens and entrepreneurs of this region first.

You are well on your way to making a mistake that has huge consequences. Durham staff are doing the onerous job of trying to de-risk the series of bad decisions that you are making, but they can only do so much. Staff and residents are drowning in a planning crisis, an affordability crisis, and a climate crisis. The least you can do is throw us a life preserver instead of an anchor. Greenwashing this official plan document is not good enough. You can't just say "sustainable" 45 times and call it a day. You have to truly understand what the word means - financially and environmentally!

Stand firm in the knowledge that we have sufficient land to accommodate population and employment forecasts. Stand firm in the trust that we can be creative, resourceful, and iterative about how we create density within current urban boundaries. Stand firm in your willingness to educate and invite conversations about building more equitable spaces. Stop borrowing from the future, (and from casino reserves) to satisfy people who do not have our best interest at heart. At the end of the day, sprawl is not the answer to any of the urgent challenges we face. You mention "ACTION" 114 times in the Official Plan. How about you take some meaningful action and reject the new urban expansion areas, the Greenbelt carveouts, and more of the same car-dependency developments that aren't serving us?

If you're not going to, you should probably strip out the statement on page 9 of the OP doc because hypocrisy will be the new slogan for Durham Region.

*"The effects of human-caused climate change are being felt around the world, and the pace of change is accelerating. Durham will make great strides to improve climate resilience and will take action toward a cleaner and greener environment. Key environmental features will be protected, and our tree canopy will grow. The Oak Ridges Moraine, the Rouge National Urban Park, shorelines, rivers and creeks will be protected, connected and accessible for the enjoyment of all residents."*