

TAKE ACTION – Privately Initiated Urban Boundary Expansions into Rural Hamilton

What you need to know:

A consortium of private landowners known as the *Upper West Side Landowners Group* has submitted an application, through their planning agent [Corbett Land Strategies](#), to amend the Urban Hamilton Official Plan (UHOP) in the following ways:

- 1) Update the provincial population & employment forecasts for the City to the year 2041;
- 2) Introduce policies to the UHOP to 'allow urban boundary expansions to a maximum size of 40 hectares each, in advance of the Municipal Comprehensive Review;
- 3) Identify a number of criteria / requirements that would need to be fulfilled prior to urban boundary expansion occurring; and
- 4) Identify rural lands in the Twenty Road West area (south side of Twenty Road West, bounded by Glancaster Road, Upper James Street and Dickenson Road) as a 'candidate area' for future urban boundary expansion.

Items 1 & 2 in the list above represent [2019 policy changes](#) made by the Ford Government to the [Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe](#). Municipal official plans must conform with provincial policy; the policy changes proposed in Items 1 & 2 represent an exercise to bring the UHOP into conformity with the Ford Government's 2019 changes to the provincial Growth Plan.

Item 1 involves an extension of the current UHOP 'planning horizon' from 2031 out to 2041, and comes with associated increases in provincial population and employment projections for the City of Hamilton for those additional 10 years. Municipalities must plan to accommodate provincial population and employment projections. This includes ensuring that additional people and jobs can be accommodated via intensification in built-up areas and increased density in outlying areas and, if the need can be justified, the expansion of the urban boundary to provide more land for growth.

Item 2 is a significant shift in provincial planning policy. Prior to 2019, only municipalities could initiate urban boundary expansions and only after completing a municipal comprehensive review or MCR – a big picture assessment of if and where additional land for growth is required. Item 2 opens the door to private landowners being able to apply for urban boundary expansions up to 40 ha in size outside of and even preceding the MCR process. A municipality can deny a private boundary expansion application, leaving the landowner with no right to appeal the decision to the province's Local Planning Appeal Tribunal (LPAT). But the municipality must process the request within a legislated 120 day timeframe – a timeframe that was substantially reduced by the Ford Government from 210 days back in 2019 when the private boundary expansion policy was ushered in. When a municipality fails to process an application within the 120 day period, the applicant can appeal to the LPAT and potentially secure approval for their boundary expansion in that arena.

For Items 1 & 2, there is essentially nothing the municipality can do to stop the conformity exercise as the UHOP must conform with provincial policy. **But community members can certainly let city planners know how they feel about these provincial policy changes and encourage the municipality to follow good planning practice by NOT approving these one-off urban boundary expansions outside of a rigorous MCR process.**

Item 3 references the need for criteria that would need to be met before a boundary expansion would be allowed to proceed. The criteria being proposed by the applicant are listed in Section 2.6.1.1 of the [draft Official Plan Amendment](#) submitted to the city as part of this application. **Item 4** references the specific

geographic area within which the applicant group wants to see parcels of their land recognized as being appropriate for urban expansion and subsequently referenced in the UHOP as 'candidate areas' for future urban expansion.

Overall, items 1 to 4 lay the policy groundwork required to enable the Upper West Side Landowners Group to come back in the future to apply for their urban boundary expansions. Our understanding is that the group intends to submit 3 boundary expansion applications for 3 parcels of 40 hectares each.

Preparing & Submitting Comments:

Under the provincial Planning Act, we all have the right to comment on any changes to official plans. For this application, we are at the '[Notice of Complete Application](#)' stage. The opportunity to comment at this stage gives anyone who is interested the chance to ***share their input with city planning staff who, in turn, will consider the input and include it in the staff report that goes to Planning Committee with recommendations regarding the application.*** That staff report will be presented at what is referred to as a 'statutory public meeting' under the Planning Act – slated to happen in the early fall of this year. The public will have another opportunity at that statutory public meeting - and after seeing the staff report with recommendations - to comment again.

At this 'Notice of Complete Application' stage, community members can send comments directly to planning staff. More specifically, comments need to be sent to Heather Travis, the Senior Project Manager of the Growth Management Strategy for the city, **by July 10th**. Contact details are provided below.

When preparing your comments on this application, consider the following:

- It was the Ford Government's decision to make the policy changes to allow for privately initiated boundary expansions. If you are concerned about urban sprawl, be sure to express concern to city staff about these one-off applications and urge the city to commit to a firm urban boundary instead.
- Let planning staff also know how you feel about the way the city should evolve and grow. Accommodating growth does not have to mean endlessly expanding out into rural Hamilton. And this form of development will not address the housing crisis. There are other ways to accommodate growth through high density development in the urban core, and low to medium density in other areas through laneway suites and secondary units, stacked townhomes, and missing middle options like 3,4,5 storey apartments, etc.
- Finally, the municipality has declared a climate emergency. An essential part of such a declaration is making a serious commitment to looking at all decision making through a climate lens. Remind planning staff that it is urgent that we consider how the city evolves and grows using a climate lens. Continuing to grow outward and creating a larger geographic footprint for urban Hamilton undoubtedly means that more people will be living car dependent lifestyles. Keeping a firm urban boundary and increasing density within that boundary in appropriate ways will help to reduce our carbon footprint by building complete communities where people can live, work and play.

Comments must be submitted by July 10th to:

Heather Travis - Senior Project Manager, Growth Management Strategy
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