

CHARA Special Meeting – Ottawa Growth Strategy - May 5th

In Attendance

City Councilor - Riley Brockington
CHARA - President Darren Dicks
CHARA VP - Elizabeth Anderson
CHARA - Treasurer Adam Martin
CHARA - Director Lorraine Neville

Community Observer – Tim Patterson

City of Ottawa New Official Plan

The new Official Plan provides a strategy and policy framework to guide development and growth over a 28-year period from July 2018 to July 2046. Over this period Ottawa is projected to grow by about 402,000 persons, reaching a city-wide population of over 1.4 million people.

This growth will require in the order of 195,000 new residential units. The strategy and policy framework to accommodate this growth and the development of these units is to be established by the new Official Plan policy directions.

Councilor Brockington made a presentation outlining the various options being considered by the city and sought feedback from CHARA board members ahead of a city meeting where the matter was to be discussed. Councilor Brockington shared that motions brought forward on the matter from other community associations have been split.

The options under consideration are:

1. Status quo – development continues much as done now.
2. Balanced Expansion – modest expansion (2200 hectares) of the urban boundaries. Environmental groups opposed to and expansion of the urban boundaries as this promotes urban sprawl. In addition the transportation infrastructure is not adequate to support this. Councilor Brockington also expressed concern that quality of life issues were not quantified.
3. Full Intensification – aggressive approach to intensification within the urban boundary. This would involve major intensification along major arterial streets (e.g. Carling, Fisher, Baseline). For example, 12 towers are already approved for two block stretch Carling Avenue with a 13th being evaluated for approval. The character of many existing communities would be disrupted, and with an increase in traffic safety would become an issue. No expansion plan aggressively focuses on inner city, which includes in its catchment the area serviced by CHARA.

Lorraine Neville brought up a point that due to the COVID 19 crisis, the largest disruption to the functioning of the country since WWII, there has been very little opportunity for the general public to provide feedback to the city, and that most of the feedback that has been provided has been made by developers with a vested interest. She pointed out that only 0.05% of the

population have thus far been involved in the discussion and that the city should postpone the decision for a year until the crisis has ended, so that a representative proportion of the population could contribute to the discussion. Councilor Brockington replied that 5 white papers on the proposal have thus far been released. Despite COVID-19 not being on the horizon when a deadline of 2021 was established for a decision on the matter, the city council had already approved the timeline so it would not be possible for there to be a delay on deciding the development options. There was a general consensus around the table that under the circumstances a delay was warranted. Riley indicated that he would pass on the request, due to the difficulties that delegations are facing in appearing before city council.

There was a comment from Darren Dicks where he expressed concern about an apparent lack of integration between development plans and simultaneous development of proper transportation infrastructure. He outlined the existing transportation woes where major developments have occurred that were not accompanied by the necessary infrastructure.

Councilor Brockington spoke of a desire of having communities that are affordable. Without intensification many citizens will be forced to move outside the city and commute to jobs. Both Elizabeth Anderson and Darren Dicks pointed out that even with infill housing, the core of the city is becoming more expensive. As an example Elizabeth Anderson detailed the situation on Morley Blvd where three houses were replaced by eight houses, each of which sold for twice as much as the original homes (>\$900,000 each). Elizabeth Anderson questioned how such intensification could occur on streets with ditches and without sidewalks. Street parking is now the norm there due to inadequate driveways built for the new houses, making it difficult for pedestrians and cyclists to keep clear of traffic since they are forced into the middle of the street. Councilor Brockington replied that updating of infrastructure in such neighbourhoods is not possible due to budgetary constraints. In response to a query enquiring why, when an entire block is redeveloped, as was the case on Morley, developers should not be made responsible for updating the infrastructure, Councilor Brockington replied that updating infrastructure is a city responsibility.

There was a comment from the floor regarding whether the intensification options were already obsolete before even being approved. COVID-19 has resulted in a seismic shift toward workers in both the private and public sector telecommuting. For many the shift will be permanent and result in many people opting to live in satellite communities reducing the need for living in Ottawa. It was also suggested that for those who do commute the establishment of better train service to communities such as Smith Falls, where housing is more affordable would take development pressure off the city. Councilor Brockington responded that there was no budget for the development of such commuter services.

The final item of discussion during the meeting was to prioritize concerns of CHARA board members. The main items of concern raised to Councilor Brockington were:

- Impact of climate change – Prioritize impact of projected major increases precipitation and snow on infrastructure
- Public transportation / traffic congestion in areas. Don't build a road if you can't take care of the snow or water. Lorraine brought up the point that Prince of Wales seems to have been over engineered for bike lanes on both sides of the street, but with only two lanes provided inadequate support for vehicular traffic despite it being the main arterial transportation route from the very communities that have been built to the south. It was pointed out that only 2% of commuters use bicycles and despite the enormous resources expended on building state of the art bicycle lanes they were used as a snow dump during the winter months. Planners seem to be driven by ideology rather than practicality. Adam Martin spoke in favor of the bicycle lanes.
- Housing affordability crisis. It was once more reiterated that the more the housing is forced into the core the more expensive it will be. The people with limited resources who would benefit from living in the core are being forced to live in outlying areas and commute.
- Maintenance of existing infrastructure. The 'band aid' approach, of keeping infrastructure going for as long as possible, resulting in water main breaks etc. needs to be addressed.

CHARA Recommendation to Councilor Brockington on the Official Growth Plan

At the end the meeting the CHARA board reached a consensus that their recommendation to councilor Brockington was that the status quo model be chosen. The reason given was that due to the lack of opportunity for citizens to fully understand the ramifications of the other development options in the very short time allowed this is only the prudent course of action.