

March 6, 2017

Mayor Goldring, City of Burlington

Members of Council, City of Burlington

Re: Green Space Policies in the New Official Plan

BurlingtonGreen is closely following the City's Strategic Planning and the new Official Plan process, and is eagerly awaiting the release of the forthcoming draft Official Plan. Green space and the policies surrounding it are of particular interest as green space is critical in sustaining environmental health and we know that the citizens of Burlington value green space and parks as a top priority for why they enjoy living in Burlington. BurlingtonGreen has long advocated for the City to ensure the preservation of green space is part of the Official Plan for Burlington.

Consistent with our organization's solution-focus, during the past 4 months, we have taken steps to better understand the City's planning actions in regards to green space and the Official Plan by meeting with various City staff members. We have also leveraged the expertise of one of our Advocacy Team volunteers to map green space within the city's boundaries to better understand what exists and to identify potential gaps in the context of intensification planning. The Team has prepared a report explaining our position on green space in the City with emphasis on the urban areas.

The key outcomes of these efforts are as follows:

The mapping exercise we have conducted thus far reveals that new policies need to be introduced in the intensification area to address the new needs of the City and to support the City's proposed growth model.

Our meeting with City staff members who reviewed our draft report let us know that a holistic plan for green space is not to be included in the forthcoming Official Plan as doing so would among other things, require updating of the City's Parks, Recreation and Cultural Assets Master Plan and there are not resources in place to address this. We are perplexed with how effective planning to support smart intensification principles can occur without the critical green space component being addressed simultaneously. Considering the ambitious and long term projection of Burlington's Official Plan, the preservation and expansion of green space within the urban boundary is crucial, especially in light of the shift from a suburban to a more urban community.

“As the city continues to change and grow, we must regularly revisit the Official Plan to ensure we are realizing the city's collective vision and responding to our community's needs.”

– City of Burlington website

The need to preserve and expand green space within Burlington’s intensification area must be addressed through innovative planning strategies and policy changes. This encompasses a holistic approach that links green space to land use policies, transportation, parkland dedication rates, and securing land for green space through non-traditional means. All of these components will integrate to secure sufficient green space that supports sustainable growth, a healthy environment and quality of life for the residents of Burlington for generations to come.

The current parkland provision rates in the Official Plan serve a suburban community, and do not meet the demands of a more urban community and the expected needs arising from intensification. BurlingtonGreen has recognized this gap and proposes the following recommendations to ensure that green space policies are reflective of the City’s new needs.

Recommendation – Update the City’s Parks, Recreation and Cultural Assets Master Plan

To be able to determine parkland dedication policies that will work, the City’s Parks, Recreation and Cultural Assets Master Plan must be updated. The current 2009 document does not address the changing needs of the City and its review is the first step in assessing the current situation and writing new policies that support the provision of sufficient green space within the intensification area.

Recommendation – Update the City’s Parkland Dedication Practice

The City has traditionally favored cash-in-lieu as an option for fulfilling parkland dedication requirements, and a review of this practice is needed. Now more than ever, it is important to secure land on site in the intensification area and dedicate it for use as parkland. The City also needs to work on developing innovative and non- traditional means of securing land for park space through partnerships with developers and public / private partnerships. Moreover, where current parkland is not sufficient, the option of buying land and dedicating it to parkland should be considered.

Recommendation – Green space Inventory and Acquisition Plan

A comprehensive green space inventory (including non-public lands), and acquisition plan is essential so informed decisions can be made about protecting natural areas and parklands before they are threatened. This includes lands under threat by school closures that should be preserved and repurposed for public use.

We thank Council for your consideration of our input and recommendations and welcome the opportunity to present our green space report formally to Council at its earliest convenience.

In the meantime, BurlingtonGreen urges Council to act fast on this important matter by directing staff to address the three recommendations outlined above, thereby ensuring green

space preservation is integrated in the Official Plan. Doing so will be key in ensuring the success of the City's "Grow Bold" & "Healthy and Greener" strategic directions.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Gloria Reid".

Gloria Reid
Board President

c.c. James Ridge,
City Manager

Mary-Lou Tanner
Chief Planner