

RE: Proposed Urban Boundary Expansions, Niagara Region

by *Linda Manson*

My take-away comments from the proposed urban boundary expansion Public Information Centre (PIC) are included in the comprehensive submission by Biodiversity & Climate Action Niagara (BCAN) — a concise, respectfully edited ‘collective eyes’ view of overall and specific concerns which I hope will achieve deserved, serious review and action *vs.* rote responses.

Something clearly demonstrated by example in that BCAN submission is that simultaneous multiple map overlays (including Google Earth shots) is not only possible, but an essential tool in presenting the whole picture in a ‘visual consequences’ way — to the public and our elected officials.

Q: Will you start doing that?

Not all comments by all of us ‘made the cut’ ... So here are my ‘out-takes’:

Unless revoked, the province’s new (2019) policy allowing further urban boundary expansions of under 40 ha will always be there — to be invoked at will, when argued “it’s needed.” Worst part is, it can be requested by individuals (developers, land-owners). Just a week ago, land severance was granted (by Committee of Adjustment) for the rural property abutting the south side of Carl Road, Niagara Falls, across the road from your #3 recommendation site.

Q: What will you say when they ask?

The Niagara Falls planning staff report recommending 65% intensification within the existing urban boundary? Pin-pointing where growth could and should take place — to save 200 ha of wasteful, irreversible, unnecessary urban sprawl? Brilliant! I was thrilled when it appeared on city council agenda, sent written kudos to staff ... but (alas) was in no way surprised by its rejection at my local level. If only, it had been the planning model for our Region!

Q: Did you, in fact, even take a look at that staff report?

Natural Environment System Option 3C was chosen by Regional Council, yet staff is still using old language — “environmental features (vs. systems) will be protected.” And for all that talk of those “features” being protected ... no mention of the fact that protection will be reduced the minute any urban boundary expansion site becomes URBAN — which is why BCAN members and others were pushing so hard for introduction of an Option 3C+ ... We saw this coming, of course! (So did staff.)

Q: What opportunities will exist to improve on Option 3C — within urban boundaries?

Regional staff actually stated at the PIC, “We have no tree bylaw.” We were told the public is doing a great job of reporting ... but it’s a case of fines/slap on the wrist/plant new trees/ whatever — after damage is done. Niagara needs a “you destroy ... you never develop there” policy.

Q: Are you aware of such a thing elsewhere?

Q: Would you be willing to suggest?

We were all pleased to hear that Regional staff is reviewing new approach(es) to the existing farce of Environmental Impact Studies — routinely used to justify flagrant environmental destruction. Changes to the status quo will be essential ... moving forward!

Which brings me to Pelham Community Area Expansion Recommendation #2 — site of the proposed Merritt Road extension. BCAN's summary of members' comments over this betrayal of our environment are candid and the conclusion clear, it is "unconscionable and should not move forward." But that comes nowhere near reflecting our true, justified outrage!

My 'out-take'? After repeated dismissal and denial at PICs ... The Merritt Rd. saga has finally (no surprise) exposed its ugly head in full GORE: A cabal-era traffic master plan is set in motion ... "Moving Roads Forward" with total disregard for obvious environmental destruction ... Giving a whole new meaning to the phrase "Build it and they will come" ... Proceeding "as planned" ... In spite of enormous, enlightened, eloquent public objection ... In spite of supposedly protected status via NES mapping and Option 3C approval (December 1st) ... In obvious full knowledge of Urban Boundary Expansion (UBE) plans for this very site (exposed a week later, December 8th) ... This whole process has (arguably) been an orchestrated farce.

Q: How do we stop it?

And about that 3C – UBE timing?

Seeing Fort Erie Recommendation #2 a week after endorsing Option 3C "made my head explode," exclaimed Mayor Redekop — who went on to explain that it may not be "significant" by provincial definition ... but it certainly IS to all the wildlife that call it home! Our BCAN submission clearly explains a host of other, scientific reasons (ancient, irreplaceable local genetics) why that entire area south of Garrison Road should be eliminated from development consideration. To which I add, "home invasion" is wrong!

Q: Will you be looking for a replacement recommendation — or better yet, an intensification option?