

Submission to the Joint Special Meeting of the Planning & Environment Committee and the Agriculture & Rural Affairs Committee

May 12, 2009

Agenda item 1: Comprehensive Five Year Review of the Official Plan

The Federation of Citizens' Associations of Ottawa-Carleton [FCA] is the umbrella group for community associations and like civic groups in Ottawa.

In appearing before the joint committees on March 31, the FCA called for five changes to the revised Official Plan revisions, these were:

- that the expansion of the urban boundary not occur or that it be significantly scaled back;
- that non-residential needs (particularly land for employment) be considered in any discussion of enlarging the urban area;
- that measurement of intensification and of density be clear and be given legal status;
- that conditions under which tall building are permitted be clarified; and
- that provisions allowing additional country lot estates in rural Ottawa be reconsidered.

We are pleased that the staff report has taken note of the issues which we raised and we thank them for their consideration. Nevertheless, with respect to several issues we fail to find the staff response convincing.

The urban boundary

In our submission, we made the point that the population projection for 2031 is lower than that earlier posited for 2021; nonetheless it is suggested that more land is needed to accommodate the lesser population. Not only is this "counter-intuitive" as admitted in the staff response, it is indicative of our collective failure to move, as we publicly have pledged, toward a compact, efficient urban form.

Our past inability to achieve higher density is not really a good excuse to abandon our goals now. We have said we would trim our urban waist but have reached for the eclairs which we had promised to avoid. Achieving our objectives is not easy; giving up now does not make it easier.

It is particularly regrettable that we engage in the sort of self-delusion which is a product of "creative accounting".

If you permit, I wish to explain how creative accounting is applied. The staff report says we need more land because land has been developed since the Official Plan of 2003 came into effect. Some 1500 hectares have been developed while 470 hectares were added to the urban area during the period. This means we presumably have 1030 fewer hectares in reserve. Considering

our population expectation has fallen significantly, why does this calculation force us to add to the urban area?

The staff report says the expected increase in density of single detached units fell. Expanding the urban boundary further sends a strong signal that we have no intention of reaching our targets for increased density over the next five year period.

The staff report says that Community Design Plans adopted call for only 40% of housing as singles and semis rather than 60% as expected. This means that the detailed planning procedures put in place by the Official Plan indicated an unexpectedly strong identification of denser forms of housing. Is this not what we used to call “smart growth”? When intense discussion between citizens, business and the city directs planning away from singles and semis, why does this constitute a justification for expansion of the urban boundary?

Finally I repeat the concern expressed earlier that demand for land is artificially inflated by assuming that any land added to the urban area must, to quote the staff report “avoid creating areas that would be entirely comprised of single detached houses...” Differentiating between R1 and R4 zoning is a subject for the Zoning By-law, not for the Official Plan. The Official Plan is the parent document of the Zoning By-law. At the Official Plan level any expansion of the urban area would be designated General Urban.

There seems to be little problem in securing an amendment to zoning in Ottawa. Members of Planning Committee process such applications in great numbers and with great dispatch. The argument that a calculation of land needed for single homes must be boosted by approximately 40% to avoid ghettos of detached homes, is without merit.

Country Lot Estates

Turning to the issue of country lot estates, the FCA has asked that this type of development not be permitted. In our earlier submission we presented good reasons for our position. The staff report does not challenge our arguments but simply does not recommend terminating permission for these developments.

To assist Councillors in their deliberations about country lot estates, the following questions might be directed to city planning staff:

- Is it correct that country lot estates are not permitted in many Ontario municipalities as FCA claims?
- Prior to the adoption of the 2003 Official Plan did city planning staff recommend that country lot estates not be permitted?
- What are the changes in planning practice that have resulted in a shift in the attitude of planning staff to country lot estates over the past six years?

With respect to the other matters we raised, we continue to fear that bold statements about density targets will be rendered meaningless by uncertainty about measurement, that tall buildings may be inappropriately authorized and that our public discussion about urban development takes insufficient account of non-housing issues.

We wish Council wisdom in its deliberations regarding the Official Plan.