

Preservation of Agricultural Lands Society Comments-DPD 32-2021–Dr. John Bacher (PhD)

August 5, 2021

PALS comments on DPD-32-2021 are focused on opposing lands proposed for urban expansion that are supported by a lower tier municipal council. These appear to be restricted to the following municipalities. We anticipate that the Niagara region will agree with the various local councils that have rejected the private amendments designated in blue.

a) West Lincoln

It is proposed in West Lincoln to have an urban boundary expansion which surrounds the entire municipality. In their recent submission West Lincoln called for more certainty regarding the fate of a road crossing of the Niagara Escarpment in Grimsby. This is a most inappropriate interference with the environmental review process. It also shows a reason why the proposed road should be denied. It is being planned to be used to justify urban expansions that cannot be serviced with transit (contrary to good planning to reduce climate change), have vulnerable Karst features, Class One farmland, and protected wetlands that would become isolated. The submission also strangely criticized PALS for past allegedly “erroneous” comments without saying what they actually are.

b) Niagara Falls

Niagara Falls is shown in the map as supporting one proposed urban expansion in the area bordered by Kalar Road and the Queen Elizabeth Highway. It has been the subject of a brief in support by one of the owners of these lands, River Realty. The submission received from the City of Niagara Falls Planning Department recently as part of the development of a new plan, does not support an urban boundary expansion in this municipality. Instead, it refers to an excellent Housing Needs and Supply Report for Niagara Falls. It concluded, as the Planning Department summarized in its submission to the Niagara Region, that, *“To help achieve this affordability target and diversify the City’s Housing Supply, the report recommends that the City Direct a greater proportion of its future household growth to the City’s Built Up area as opposed to the Designated Greenfield Area.”* It recommended that the current 50% intensification figure be revised upwards to 60%.

As PALS stated in our earlier submission the proposed urban expansion between Kalar Road and the Queen Elizabeth Highway was rejected by the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB) in an adjudication that was later confirmed by the Ontario Superior Court of Justice. This was done for a number of important reasons. One was the high agricultural capability of these lands. Another was the good habitat provided for breeding amphibians by the Ten Mile Creek and an adjacent woodland, both of which form part of the Niagara Region’s Core Natural Habitat area. The subject lands were also found to provide habitat for a Threatened Species, the Barn Swallow.

c) Fort Erie

It appears that there are two urban boundary expansions in Fort Erie which are municipally supported. These are both employment lands. One block is referred to as the Stevensville Industrial Cell. The other is a block of agriculturally zoned lands adjacent to the Queen Elizabeth Highway, the majority of which comprise the former Canadian Motor Speedway lands. The low level of need for employment lands of 20 hectares, while a warning against changing designations for residential purposes, is too small to justify any urban expansions, especially when the populations projections used for them are higher than those employed by the provincial government. The urban boundary expansions supported by the Fort Erie Council are virtually all for employment lands, either along the Queen Elizabeth Highway, or the Stevensville Industrial Cell. Such an expansion would disrupt the heart of some of the best remaining natural Carolinian habitats, Canada’s most species diverse biome.

d) Welland

From reading the recent Planning Department report it appears that the proposed Welland Urban Expansion has been approved, without, as was originally intended, a corresponding reduction in the Dain City area. This means that around half of the proposed 460 hectare urban boundary expansion need for residential purposes should be considered as being met. This would eliminate most of the proposed residential need being used to justify urban expansions in the City of Niagara Falls and West Lincoln.