

Regional Council Presentation – Wilmot Land Owners – March 20, 2024

Good evening - Chair Redman, and members of Regional Council. My name is Alfred Lowrick and I am a resident in the Township of Wilmot and represent landowners who recently were informed that their lands would be expropriated if an amicable settlement is not achieved. The lands in question are 770 acres prime farm land from Wilmot Centre to Nafziger Road south of Hwy 7&8 and north of Bleams Rd.

Our landowner's group were approached independently just over a week ago by a consultant the Region is using with an offer to their purchase farms. The timelines given for acceptance for this offer was today which is absurd given the massive disruption to our lives this totally expected situation creates with a goal to reach full land acquisition by August of this year. Our core group of landowners have met daily to determine what can be done as we feel that this is an immense misuse of prime Wilmot Township farmland. This land expropriation would change the nature of our local community and the Region forever.

A larger group of concerned citizens met yesterday with our core team in order for us to update them on what is proposed. Many of these people are long term farming families who located in the area due to the high quality of farmland and reassurance that lands like this, far from existing urban centres would not face development pressures. To say they were distraught and devastated is an understatement. What is worse is that this all came as a surprise to all of us. No formal notifications, meetings and consultations. The outcome of our meeting was that landowners are cohesively against this as a united front and they are set for the fight of their lives.

Before I get into the lack of planning rationale, I would like to comment on how this consulting organization worked with some of our group. We had reports of offer material just being dropped off, unfeeling remarks like "I'm here to buy your land on behalf of the Region" and "this acquisition is a forgone conclusion so get used to it". One of the landowners was approached multiple times in less than a week with the most recent at her place of work. The pressure and lack of professionalism is appalling and the lack of communications from our local layers of government is unfathomable. Add into this township staff, councillors and regional councillors refusing to provide any information or direction is simply callous.

We are deeply concerned because this action by the Region of Waterloo is so incongruent with so many of their environmental, sustainability and climate change initiatives - as well as inconsistent with all long-term planning. We are told that this land acquisition is for an industrial plant initiative. Again, no details on what is being contemplated but the size, scale, and absurd location of this plant could destroy our Region's visionary Countryside Line concept and make it impossible to reach essential Green House Gas emission reductions to meet our federal, provincial and regional Paris Accord commitments.

There is tremendous concern about climate change by the vast majority of Canadians who are expecting our governments to be stepping up with solutions - not undertaking activities that will make things far worse. We are already losing an unsustainable 300+ acres of farmland every day which will be catastrophic unless we quickly change our ways.

While there is always strong public support for new economic initiatives that will bring new, well-paying jobs to our communities, there is already considerable concern and confusion about the unusual and unexpected site being chosen by the Region for this industrial site. While Wilmot Council might be thrilled to think the next Toyota battery plant could be in their municipality, I can now see why Township staff was reluctant to provide any information. I wouldn't underestimate how many people are horrified about it and the impacts it could bring to our rural township in this distant, challenging location. The vast majority of the public will want to see farmland protected and this factory located in a better site closer to the cities and with far less negative impacts.

We have a few questions which you may want to ask staff about:

- why is this industrial site being built on prime farmland rather than reclaimed aggregate sites, greyfield, brownfield, or other already compromised locations that already abound in the Region?
- why is the site being located outside of settlement boundaries and so far from our major cities which will make our roadways even busier?
- why has there been no public engagement or even discussion about this particular location in all the extensive long-term planning the Region has undertaken?,
- All remaining capacity at the New Hamburg/Baden sewage plant has already been allocated for residential growth and additional expansion will be extremely expensive if even possible because the Nith River watershed is already at its capacity,
- why has the GRCA not had any input in this planning?,
- has anyone thought of the lack of significant highway/transportation access (except for Highway 7/8), or a rail line that is already heavily congested with passenger rail traffic? There is little possibility of public transit in this area forcing thousands of long automobile trips daily,
- what about water availability for these lands and if it would trigger the need for a pipeline to Lake Erie. One needs to remember that much of our Region's ground water comes from Wilmot township and water quality is already suffering,

If other large industrial plants and automotive plants are any indication, it will set off a chain reaction of much additional surrounding farmland loss for additional and ancillary uses - just look at the impact Honda has had on the destruction of thousands of additional acres of surrounding farmland for kilometers in every direction in Alliston, Ontario with additional factories, warehouses, logistics companies, etc. all of which needed to be close to the plant.

A similar story is unfolding in St. Thomas. Our landowner team went there on Monday and saw what has happened to 1,600 acres of farmland there for the VW battery plant. We spoke to a farmer whose land is being expropriated and we noted that her story has so many of the same concerns that we facing.

Clearly from our viewpoint Regional Staff hasn't done enough of their homework and have made a really poor choice with this distant, constrained location lacking most of the essential infrastructure and features industrial purchasers will be seeking.

It will needlessly destroy our essential farmland and compromise so many long-term Regional initiatives such as the Countryside Line, the Regional Official Plan, sustainable communities, and could end any hope of actually reaching Regional Green House Gas targets given this absurd, remote location.

We look forward to working with you to find far better solutions as there are numerous locations in Waterloo Region where this sort of development has always been anticipated, would be far more sustainable, and would be welcomed.

Thank you.