

Wilmot Land Expropriation Meeting Presentation

April 4, 2024 - Wilmot Mennonite Church

Thank you, Angie, and thank you **all** for being here today. Since we first met a few weeks ago, your organizing committee has been active in trying to get the pertinent issues in front of political parties at all levels as well as engaging other organizing groups that can affect the outcome of this land expropriation. This committee has been drawn from experts in the community and the Region and we have just begun to build action plans and engage additional groups.

As I noted in the invitation you received yesterday there have been a lot of concerns raised across the community including both accurate information and **misinformation** that has been primarily driven by social media. Our intent today is to provide a forum to let affected area residents' concerns be heard by officials that can take your issues forward. This is the first of a town hall series being planned with others at Morningside in the community centre in the next weeks.

Not a day has gone by that this topic has not been in the news and we thank all media partners for their diligence in getting the proper information out to their viewers and readers.

At this point we have not received any official information from the Region or Provincial governments on what their plans are. No expropriation notices have been issued to the landowners and the initial offers to purchase farmlands have expired. As the Region of Waterloo is the expropriating authority, all information from other agencies and governing bodies is really mute. We anticipate the Region's next steps shortly and will keep you posted.

As we've noted in our recent presentations to Wilmot Township and Waterloo Regional Council this expropriation has several key elements, namely:

- Inappropriate use of valuable and limited farmland in the Region,
- The environmental concern of water contamination and water supply for our Township and the Region,
- Pollution and runoff into the Nith River as well as essential groundwater aquifer recharge areas,

- Unexpected dramatic changes to our rural social fabric. If the proposed growth of industrial and residential areas occur, New Hamburg and Baden could see the addition of tens of thousands of new residents and become the size of a city in a really short period of time.
- Traffic congestion on our highway and all our rural roadways. If we thought the 7&8 was busy now just add all the traffic that will be coming from Kitchener and surrounding areas.
- The total disregard of years of official planning for Wilmot Township and the entire Region of Waterloo. The Regional's Official plan, focussed on urban growth in our cities and farmland protection in our countryside was just finalized in 2022 and there was no mention of this – what happened? The Region as recently as December voted against funding any industrial-mega site so how can things change so quickly and where is the money coming from?
- And perhaps worst of all, the lack of transparency and accountability within regional and township governments. We can't get any answers. This issue strikes at the heart of public trust in our government institutions and the integrity of our democratic process.
- Tied to this is the leak of confidential plans that allowed developers to try and purchase lands before the expropriation process started. We thank Terry Pender from the WR Record that has taken up this fight to find out how this information was leaked. I call this issue "Greenbelt 2.0 or perhaps Farmgate" as it has all the makings of the inappropriate dealings at Queens Park.

So, you ask what can be done about this?

Firstly, communications need to be harnessed. We already have other groups in the area that are using this issue for their own causes. Our website is being updated daily and we encourage you to get accurate information directly from our website at www.fightforfarmland.com. Social media, although interesting, has already caused so much misinformation that we realize that we are going to need to take some time to develop a careful social media strategy.

E-mail directly to you may become another important communication method so please make sure that if you are not already receiving emails from me, that you provide your email on one of the signup sheets before you leave.

We are also in the process of having “Fight For Farmland” lawn signs created that we hope you will display at your homes. We hope to have the first shipment from the printer later this afternoon. We are suggesting a voluntary donation of \$10 per sign to help cover the costs of production. If you are interested in a sign, please also complete one of the sign-up sheets before you leave.

If you haven't already done so, please sign the petition on our website, Catherine Fife's website as well as the hardcopies that exist throughout the township. Our website petition already has over 22,300 signatures and is growing rapidly. To put this in context the Township of Wilmot's population is only 22,000. Thanks to everyone that has already signed – it really helps to send a strong message with such impressive numbers of people speaking up!

I thank you for your attention and we will answer questions after the other presentations this morning.