

## PUBLIC PARTICIPATION MEETING COMMENTS

### 11. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION MEETING – Property located at 6188 Colonel Talbot Road (Z-8795)

- *(Councillor A. Hopkins indicating that she is not that familiar with the background of this application, realizing that it did go to Committee of Adjustment and just wondering why it went there and what is it used for now or where do we stand with this application.); Mr. J. Adema, Planner II, responding that the property was at the Committee of Adjustment, he believes that it was at the end of 2015 or possibly early 2016 and that was to establish the current mushroom farm use; advising that it is an indoor hydroponic mushroom farm; through the Committee of Adjustment minor variance they were able to approve that use and it was established; responding to the Councillor's other question about the existing uses, there is the hydroponic mushroom farm on the front part of the site along Colonel Talbot Road, which would be within the ten acre severed portion and the approximate remaining fourteen hectares would be used for field crops. (Councillor A. Hopkins asking if mushrooms are being grown now on the property.); Mr. J. Adema, Planner II, indicating that yes, they are, it is operational.*
- *(Councillor M. van Holst indicating that last week he had a chance to go on the Fall Farm Tour with the London Chamber of Commerce and they visited a mushroom farm; noting that it was not this one; indicating that the owner was so innovative and knowledgeable that he just captivated a crowd for at least a half an hour talking what was going on there, very interesting; indicating that these are pretty old policies and he thinks that a lot of thought has gone into agriculture since 1989 and the idea of intensive microfarming has become more of a thing for people to be able to deal with smaller lots where you are creating niche crops like this mushroom farm is possible; thinking we should have some of those in the city; because this site is fairly small maybe it would be a good place to start; expressing support for this so that they could see movement toward that, he would like the Council to experiment with the possibility of having smaller lots to see what people can do with them because they would certainly be more attainable price wise than a large one hundred acre property; advising that he sees the possibility of smaller lots being much more flexible than the larger ones and more viable and they may have to rethink some of those older policies.)*
- *(Councillor J. Helmer indicating that there is a comment on page 129 of the Planning and Environment Committee Agenda about there being an Ontario cottage on the site that was demolished without a permit and it was listed on the Inventory of Heritage Resources; wondering if staff could speak to that.); Mr. J. Adema, Planner II, responding that through the pre-application consultation they identified that a heritage building had been removed without a permit and one of the requirements was that a demolition permit be provided with the application; noting that it was provided. Mr. J. Yanchula, Manager, Urban Regeneration, responding that a listed property was demolished before they knew that it was demolished and they do not have evidence of who demolished it, they just know that they have evidence of it being there and then it not being there without being able to confirm how that happened they signed off on the required clearance for the demolition permit since it would have been very difficult to prove one way or the other what happened on that actual site and by whom.*
- Joseph Plutino, Mainline Planning Services – advising that he is familiar with policy and Official Plans as they pertain to direction or Provincial interest and the application of policies such as the Provincial Policy Statement to achieve the goals of a Ministry; stating that in his thirty years what they try to do is look at the general intent and purpose of policy and they weigh it against the application so that they can determine whether there is going to be some kind of adverse impact or ultimately, at the end of the day, what are they trying to achieve; advising that it is very difficult to harvest this type of mushroom but the owner of the corporation came up with an incredible process and a hydroponic facility that works basically on recycled water and a wood chip medium; stating that they are growing mushrooms from a non-soil environment which is a traditional farm unit most everywhere in Canada if you were to have a mushroom farm in London it would be located here in an AG-2 parcel, that parcel would likely be one hundred acres or more, it would require fertilizers and manures, etc. to make it grow; noting that they do not smell great; advising that this facility is completely enclosed within a fourteen thousand square foot building so it is agriculture industry at its finest; advising that it is state of the art, it contains equipment that was conceived by the owners and has made them a foremost producer of mitake mushrooms in the world; indicating that the gentleman was courted by their client and talked into coming to London to a property that he owns that happens to be forty-five acres; indicating that this building, at any given time, has well over thirty-thousand pounds of mushrooms growing actively; stating that it is completely contained, completely controlled and it is basically farmed on one third of an acre; giving the Planning and Environment

Committee an idea of what is needed to be a viable and productive farm business; pointing out that it is an employer, it has employees, it has several people working there; advising that the issue is that, after paying for the facility and everything else, financing is only available for what he needs for now and for his future use; advising that ten acres is the size that would guarantee that this facility will have the flexibility to grow and prosper and produce mushrooms for a long time; stating that over the ten acres, the building could be expanded three or four times and produce an incredible harvest every year; indicating that the Provincial Policy Statement policy 2.3.4.1a relies on the City of London, through its Official Plan, to clarify what that is; indicating that the Policy at the Province does not state that one hundred acres is an appropriate size, it may be in London, it may not be in the Holland Marsh where cash crop production can be done in a viable way in a very small parcel and it certainly does not consider the fact that we have technology now to produce 30,000 pounds more of mushrooms at one time on one third of an acre of floor space in an indoor facility producing this, not during a growing season of a summer but all year round; advising that while other farms are fallow and not working, this farm is actually employing people and continuing all year round; relating to the Official Plan, the Provincial government requires Council's to consider its policies, its direction, the fact that agricultural lands are provincial interests, the fact that they must be sustainable, they must be allowed to exist and not be fragmented but the Official Plan for the City has determined that a minimum one hundred acre lot size is that parcel size and it is basing that on history, on traditional farm units, it is not considering what they are proposing here; stating that if a viable farm for field crops is to be one hundred acres, the fact remains that this area has been bisected by Provincial highways and major arterial roads used to access Highways 401 and 402; indicating that approximately sixty-five percent of the parcels are less than the size of the subject parcel being forty-five acres; thinking that twenty-five to thirty percent are in the order of approximately ten to fifteen acres or less; stating that if he had a two hundred acre parcel and he wanted to sever it into two one hundred acre parcels he would not need an amendment to the zoning by-law; noting that there is no policy that discourages it; stating that he does not believe that that policy should be interpreted to not make these small parcels that exist and are not one hundred acres and do not conform to the flexibility test and the field crop production, the ability to do a bunch of different crops on a rotating basis, they already do not qualify for that; believing that the higher order policies of the City should be looked at; advising that the *Planning Act* does state that all development in the municipality should be sustainable economically; believing that if you apply 2.3.4.1a then the idea is that those three lots that exist in our neighbourhood that are one hundred acres should not be fragmented to be less than that; indicating that they are not looking at a one hundred acre parcel, they are looking at a forty-five acre parcel; advising that the creation of a ten acre parcel to guarantee the future of this mushroom farm, that it stays and it is economically viable is appropriate in this case and the remaining thirty-five acre parcel, if it is not severed off it will be owned by the mushroom farm if they can afford to make that move and it will be held fallow from agricultural use; presently the forty-five acres, historically it was used to grow field crops but together with approximately three or four hundred acres of land under contract with the farmer; believing that the intent of the Provincial Policy is maintained because there is a contiguous parcel, although not within a property identification number at a registry office; noting that it is being used for that purpose; encouraging London's vision, Policy 1181.7 and allow parcels that are flexible as farm practices and management techniques evolve they will see that smaller parcels like this ought to still exist to the benefit of the City. (See attached communication.)

- Dan Lane, applicant – advising that for the past fifteen years he has been assembling land in the London area; noting that this parcel is part of a five hundred acre land assembly that he has done; indicating that he has syndicated that land out to various different investors in the hopes of bringing employment and bringing jobs here to London; stating that the properties there, traditionally, were cash crops; noting that there is one farmer predominantly doing all the cash crops and all of the properties are rented out to him; stating that it is traditional farming because the city's policies are twenty-seven years old with how you do the farming; looking at ways to create things and make it so that they can do more viable as people have only used and let people rent these lands to developers and other people traditionally throughout Ontario because they have the farm tax savings; advising that that is the only reason that area is being farmed like it is; stating that it is not viable right now for a farmer in that area to buy one hundred acres and farm it out himself, he just could not produce the amount of money to do that; indicating that he is a farmer himself and he understands how it works; pointing out that they assembled this land because there are four interchanges and you are on two major highways, the four hundred series highways; indicating that it is a unique area especially from Decker, Wonderland, Highway 401 and Colonel Talbot Road; advising that most of that land has been divided up; indicating that there is only one real farming operation in that area; advising that the rest of the people there it is either industrial, industry or they are renting it out to the cash croppers waiting for development to come; explaining that that is a little bit of why he has

done that, why he bought that land and what he sees happening in the future; advising that the microfarming and the farming that is going to happen in the future is going to change; indicating that some of the City policies need to catch up with that change.

- Joe Fontana, on behalf of Shogun Maitake – thanking Council and this Committee for granting the variance and the zoning and allowing them to build this highly technological facility; thinking the planning issues have been addressed not only by staff but also Mainline and essentially it comes down to whether or not the Committee believes, and they are not talking about severing this property for commercial or for residential or industrial use, it is for an agricultural use; indicating that, as Councillor M. van Holst has spoken, agriculture is changing and therefore you do not have to grow agricultural products on open fields, you can grow them indoors; advising that Mr. Odera came here, with the help of the London Economic Development Corporation and the City and has invested over five million dollars to build this facility and he wants to grow the facility; noting that the official opening was last week; advising that he wants to build on this but, as the Committee knows, without a severed piece of land, you cannot get financing, you cannot grow; pointing out that the alternative, if you cannot grow and build and create more jobs, he will have to go elsewhere because he will essentially be shut out; thinking that there has been enough justification, the Provincial Policy Statement says “discourages”, it does not say “prohibit”, The London Plan or the Official Plan does not say “prohibit”, it leaves it up to the Planning and Environment Committee as well as Council to look at all the facts; thinking that there is good reason to believe that this particular area is going to develop, maybe with agri-food businesses but you need flexibility and he thinks that the Official Plan, The London Plan and the Provincial Policy Statement speaks to flexibility, compatibility, sustainability so he thinks that you can make this exception and, as Mr. Lane says, this is ten acres within a four hundred acre parcel which is commonly held by a number of interested parties so it is not only ten acres of forty-five, but it is ten acres of four hundred acres; requesting that the Committee grant this severance as it is a site specific severance but he would suggest that there may be an opportunity for the Committee to look again at the long term vision of all of these lands between Highway 402 and Highway 401 on Colonel Talbot Road to see how you can have the wording and the agricultural policies fit the new way of farming and the new technologies that are available.
- *(Councillor A. Hopkins asking the applicant how many employees are presently working on the site and wondering what the plans are.);* Mr. J. Plutino, Mainline Planning Services, indicating that presently there are thirteen employees working on site.
- *(Councillor S. Turner stating that the property owner indicated that he has a land assembly of about five hundred acres and he is renting off parts of the property and others within the area rented off parcels; stating that it sounds like he is making a land assembly, perhaps in potential speculation of an expansion of the Urban Growth Boundary at some point and a change from agricultural use into something else; wondering why is continued rental of this property not a viable option.);* Mr. D. Lane, owner, responding that if he owns the forty-five acres there is no need for him to do this as he is already an agricultural use so why would he want another farmer on the property at his facility as it will be isolate, he does not want anyone on there; if he owned the forty-five acres; advising that the only reason those other people that he mentioned that are not farming it themselves are doing it is for a tax savings; that is the only reason they are farming there, it is not viable for anyone else; stating that if you put two interchanges there, you are going to rework Glanworth Drive; it is heavy equipment for a farmer to be there is not viable; talking about from the Decker Drive, Highway 401 and Colonel Talbot Road; advising that right now everyone, prior to that building being erected on the property, everyone rents out those lands in that area, himself included, to one farmer to cash crop in order to pay twenty-five percent of the municipal tax rate; stating that is the only reason you would do it, it is common across the whole Province; indicating that now that he is an agricultural use and built the building, he already has a farming number, he does not need to rent that out to anyone else and why would he; reiterating that he does not want anyone else on the property; *(Councillor S. Turner clarifying why it is not viable for him to continue to rent from Mr. D. Lane.);* Mr. D. Lane responding that it is not viable because he wanted to get financing and the banks and their people will not give him financing; indicating that he is coming from Japan so he has no real credit history, he has nothing to do with the banks, the first thing that the banks want to see is the ownership of the property.
- *(Councillor M. van Holst enquiring if the ten acres is severed, what about access to the remaining property.);* Mr. J. Adema, Planner II, responding that there would be a thirty-six metre frontage on the remaining property so presumably access would be through that frontage on Colonel Talbot Road. *(Councillor M. van Holst wondering who the applicant supplies the mushrooms to, are they just for London or are they supplying outside of the City as well.);* Mr. J. Fontana, responding that Mr. Odera was exporting from Japan to the northeastern United States and even parts of Southwestern Ontario; reporting that since he started operating, he is now exporting to Boston, New York, Southwestern Ontario and Vancouver and hopes to capitalize on the popularity of the mushroom; indicating that he

intends to expand; stating that it is locally grown, organically grown, and therefore it is in compliance with some of the other Provincial policies with regard to agriculture and locally grown food and displacing some of those exports that come from other countries.

- *(Councillor M. Cassidy indicating that it says in the report that one of the reasons why we do not like to sever these parcels into smaller parcels is then because there is the possibility that there could be two residential developments put one on each site; wondering if there is any way to put a holding provision if they were to sever this lot so that they would not allow a residential home to be built.);* Mr. J. Adema, Planner II, responding that it would probably not be through a holding provision but incorporating into the special provision that would be applied to one or both of the properties that would remove the farm dwelling from the list of permitted uses.