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Chair and Members
Planning Committee
City of London
P.O. Box 5053
London, ON N6A 4L9

Via Email

August 7, 2013

Dear Committee Members:

Re: File OZ-8120, Woodlot Removal by Pen Equity – Referral Back to Planning Committee.

I write to offer my comments on the development proposal for land located at "3130 and 3260 Dingman Drive and the rear portion of 4397/4407 Wellington Road South" as referenced above; please add me to your mailing list to be informed of future meetings on the issue.

While the initial proposal asked that a woodlot be redesignated so that the trees and associated ecosystems can be destroyed for commercial construction, a careful examination of the facts suggests that the woodlot is more than the mere vegetative woodpile inferred by the proposal. The proposal is itself at loggerheads with provincial land use expectations with which all municipal planning decisions must be consistent:

PPS Consistency Required

As I pointed out to my Councillor Denise Brown before the June 25 full City Council meeting that referred this matter back to Planning, Ontario requires that all municipal planning decisions and official plans be consistent with the Ontario Provincial Policy Statement on land use planning.

That PPS consistency requirement is described by the province as "a strong implementation standard" that generally insists that new development be directed toward extant empty commercial spaces and that existing employment areas not be detracted from.

Proposal at Loggerheads with Land Use Expectations

Moreover, in London's present context of a low-density landscape already plagued by a glut of empty retail space, this development potentially poaches both commerce and jobs from other areas. This is one essential effect that is at the very least frowned upon by Ontario land

use policy. To my recollection this very possibility is at the heart of at least one legal challenge to ill-conceived reworks of a similar nature to the Southwest Area plan and infers a landscape-inefficient, cost-incurring Council misstep.

It is evident that London has a surplus of commercial space already available for commerce that can serve for 20 years at least, and that this project is not supported by the tone and tenor of provincial land use policy itself.

Wetland Presence Changes Picture

I notice in reviewing the video of the June 25 Council meeting that a letter from the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority as addressed to the Planning Committee is mentioned by at least two Councillors. That letter evidently says clearly that the woodlot targeted for destruction is “**embedded with a wetland**.”¹

This news at the June 25 Council meeting suggests a need for attentive City-sponsored research to ensure that the PPS wetland policy is adhered to—should it happen that the wetland in this woodlot be of a status to be covered by provincial policy here as well. This is because wetlands at certain status conditions come under the ambit of the PPS.

Not to mention **woodlots** as well—the applicability of the PPS to which and to this situation I leave to the Committee to explore responsibly.

Data Quality Precedent Does Exist

I would like to express a concern regarding the quality of research materials used to determine that the woodlot is disposable. In the proposal brought by Smart-Centres several years ago for a large commercial development atop Meadowlily Woods (widely known to be a Wal-Mart store), Planning Committee wisely adopted a “City-led” planning process at the urging of London citizens who opposed that proposal (See http://www.london.ca/d.aspx?s=/Planning_and_Development/meadowlily.htm).

The result was scientifically valid research that showed the many varied species within Meadowlily Woods. While the developer at Meadowlily has since withdrawn its option on the land for that project, accurate data flowed from a wise decision to seek independent facts, and the true range of species and plants in Meadowlily became clear to all parties.

Reliance on the best data minimizes taxpayer costs by getting Council to the right decision the first time.

¹*A check of the City of London website for the Agenda listing for the Council meeting of 25 June 2013 and for the Minutes listing on the same site for the same meeting does not show that letter, so unfortunately I am unable to directly read that letter but may only quote from the verbatim public record.*

A Landscape We Should Preserve

The idea of dedicating land elsewhere with other trees is troubling. The proposal as offered does not appear to offer land with the same number of trees, and offers not even full trees in the bargain.

The land in question is not just about trees. The trees are located within an ecosystem that logically cannot be duplicated. The presence of the wetland infers that it could be very difficult to greenlight this project.

Such a determination may well be a moot point for a development proposal which on other counts is contra-indicated across the board. It is in the public interest that we preserve this woodlot.

I urge both Planning Committee and full Council to vote No to this proposal.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Keith E. Risler". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

KEITH E. RISLER

cc:

Councillor Denise Brown

Councillor Harold Usher