

HALTON STEERING AWAY FROM PROPOSED FUTURE FARMLAND GROWTH

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It may be the most attention an Official Plan amendment has ever received in Halton.

Over 50 residents — from youth to farmers to environmental activists — turned out to Halton regional council's Feb. 16 meeting to voice their support for changing course on the preferred growth concept to instead direct future development away from farmland.

And in the end, the majority of council shared the same sentiment, voting 15-9 in favour of a motion from Oakville Mayor Rob Burton and Burlington Mayor Marianne Meed Ward.

The resolution directs staff to prepare an Official Plan (OP) amendment that advances a modified preferred growth concept in two phases:

- Up to 2041: direct population and employment growth to the existing approved urban boundary.
- 2041 to 2051: Provide a clear

framework for when and how growth should be distributed, based on the principles of minimizing land consumption, and making the most efficient use of land and infrastructure.

An amendment to the motion from Halton Hills Coun. Jane Fogal and Milton Coun. Colin Best — which also passed 15-9 — indicates the specific distribution of the post-2041 growth will be defined in a further OP amendment prepared prior to or in conjunction with the next statutory five-year review.

"The phased approach provides needed time to evaluate the uncertainties about future housing and employment needs for the period 2041 to 2051," said Burton.

Meed Ward added council can't commit to saving farmland to 2051 as the OP is reviewed every five years.

"This (motion) allows us to save it on our watch; save it for today and live to fight again, which we will have to do," she said. "The pressure is not going to go away

to expand into our farmland."

She noted it isn't enough to simply save farmland.

"We have to save farming," she said. "We have to do better in supporting our farmers and truly getting a local food source right here in Halton."

In recent months, the original preferred growth concept put forth by staff — which calls for over 5,000 acres of land in Milton and Halton Hills to be designated for new housing and jobs — has become a source of great debate, with residents and councillors on both sides of the issue.

Those around the regional council table who support staff's concept spoke out during the meeting and voiced their opposition to Burton's motion, placing a particular emphasis on the need for additional employment lands in Milton and Halton Hills.

Milton councillors Mike Cluett and Zeeshan Hamid both indicated their municipality will require more employment land to be shovel-ready by 2031, contending that a lack of new busi-



Metroland file photos

The mayors across Halton have differing views on how the region should grow.

nesses and resulting development charges will lead to large residential tax increases.

"We should have a right to have a strong say in how we're going to grow, and not be told what to do by the other municipalities," said Cluett, urging his colleagues around the table to vote against the motion.

While most councillors who shared similar sentiments were from north Halton, some Burlington councillors also expressed their opposition to Burton's resolution, including Coun. Lisa Kearns.

"I can't imagine how Burling-

ton and Oakville can go about pushing for something that the local councils aren't asking for," she said.

Those who voted against the motion and amendment were: Halton Hills Mayor Rick Bonnette, Milton Mayor Gord Krantz, Halton Hills Coun. Clark Somerville, Milton councillors Rick Malboeuf, Cluett and Hamid, and Burlington councillors Paul Sharman, Kelvin Galbraith and Kearns.

Staff has now been directed to schedule a public meeting and open house on the revised growth concept no later than April 30.

The matter will be voted on again by regional council at a future meeting, prior to the July 1 deadline established by the provincial government.

For further details visit halton.ca/ropr.



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