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Subject: Official Plan and Zoning By-law Amendment Applications – 13572 and 13586 Bayview Avenue

Re:

City of Richmond Hill Council Meeting - July 6, 2022 - SRPI.22.086 – Request for Approval – Official Plan and Zoning By-law Amendment Applications – 2747883 Ontario Inc. and 275302 Ontario Inc. – 13572 and 13586 Bayview Avenue - City Files D01-20003.

The Preamble

In 1984, after a careful search for a new residential property, I relocated from the pre-amalgamation municipality of North York to my current home in Ward 1 (Oak Ridges), Richmond Hill.

Part of the reason for choosing to build a home in the Beaufort Hills subdivision was the solemn assurance from the then-"Town" of Richmond Hill senior staff that, because of the "environmentally sensitive" nature of the Oak Ridges Moraine (henceforward, "ORM"), the population of the area bordered by Bloomington Ave., Bayview Ave., Stouffville Rd./King Side Rd., and Bathurst St., would be *permanently* "capped" at 6,500.

I had been familiar with the area for about 20 years prior to moving here, but became more acutely aware of its ecological issues through participation in local community groups such as the Beaufort Hills Homeowners Association (of which I was President for a time in the 1990s), the Coalition of Richmond Hill Ratepayers (of which I also served as President in the previous century), and STORM ("Save the Oak Ridges Moraine").

Accordingly, in conjunction with Edward "Ted" Latchman, I co-wrote the narrative for a documentary film, "River Reborn" about the reclamation of the Don River from its headwaters in the ORM to Lake Ontario, authored a feature article in the environmental magazine, *Recover* about the environmental hazards arising from over-development and ecological degradation in on the ORM, and engaged in several other projects that acquainted me with ecological studies and the "science" behind the issues currently at stake.

In the process, I learned a good deal about what Governor-General's Award-winning author and Naturalist John Livingston cheerfully called the "hunk of glacial rubbish" that was formed when the glaciers took their retreat some 12,000 years ago and, in the process, laid down layers of stratified sediment including deposits of silt, soil, and stone. In the case of

the ORM, they now form the natural filtration system, the springs and the seepage systems, the aquifers and the other recharge areas for rivers flowing both north to Lake Simcoe and Georgian Bay (notably the Nottawasaga), but also to the south along a 160 kilometre stretch from the Ganaraska River and the Trent River system in the east to the Niagara Escarpment in the west. In the case of the part of the ORM that is contained within the boundaries of Richmond Hill and comprises nearly the whole of Ward 1, it is a high-water of the Humber, the Don, and the Rouge Rivers that empty into Lake Ontario within the boundaries of Toronto.

The Problem

Attentive citizens, environmental scientists, municipal planners, elected officials and all those with an "interest" (including members of the development industry whose investors *should* know), geological formations and hydrological systems are not just susceptible, but in immediate danger. The current human population on the ORM is currently in excess of 200,000 and growing at what has been called a *frantic* pace. Nowhere is that rate of increase greater or happening faster along the Yonge Street corridor and adjacent lands in Ward 1 of Richmond Hill.

In Ward 1, the greatest attention has been given to the Baif properties just to the west of this development proposal. There (given the election funding distributed by that firm) seemingly disingenuous, but enormously well-publicized efforts to alter the original (and absurdly inappropriate) proposals were recently made by some Richmond Hill councilors to amend the plan to build about a dozen huge apartment towers. What nefarious purposes are being served there remain matters of speculation only, and I won't indulge in such whimsies here. By comparison, however, *this* proposal seems downright ecologically friendly. It is not!

For the ORM to be taken *seriously*, it must be considered *holistically*. The proposed construction of eight-storey condominium apartment buildings on the properties in question with their three storeys of above-ground parking facilities because the land below cannot sustain the excavation is not, in my opinion, environmentally tenable. Nor is this project objectionable only on its own terms. It is inextricably linked by "mother nature," if not by legal all-too-human deeds signifying private ownership of lands to be monetized, commercialized, and made the focus of for-profit dealings, to adjacent lands (and wetlands) and the the rest of the ORM.

The properties at 13572 and 13586 Bayview Avenue are not separate and discrete pieces in a geological jig-saw puzzle. They are integral to and interconnected with the ORM, the boundaries of which are not established by the survey crew's 3D scanners, GPS/GNSS, levels, rods, and theodolites, but by natural connectivities unseen, unnoticed, and unrecorded in provincial lands offices.

Since at least 2009, the Richmond Hill Town Council - ably aided and abetted by the Ontario Municipal Board and its replacement, the highly contested tactical ministerial "zoning orders," have increased at a cancerous rate. They have imposed risk-laden development on environmentally fragile areas previously set aside under provincial statute for the special environmental protection and as part of the once-heralded GTA Greenbelt. The cautious commitment to some form of ecological awareness has, however, seemingly peaked under the witless cry of "getting done!" with little of know thought or care about what "it" is ... so long as it is deemed "good for business" and the development industry.

The Pattern

Seen in historical context, it is clear that we are not only witnessing the devastation of a complex and precious resource on and under the ground, but we are also becoming complicit in a plainly irresponsible set of interests being served and toxic decisions being made above the ground. Reflecting on the development industry's demands and the weak political responses to them, it is not difficult to see how that original promise of 6,500 population limit was quickly broken and how what Livingston called "the urban-industrial Holocaust in all its forms" has proceeded with only occasional stop-gap and largely symbolic gestures to temporarily obstruct, but never to stop, much less to reverse it.

Dating from my first encounters with the pertinent "players" in the development game, I have detected a common strategy evolving. Beginning in the late 1980s, each time a new development was proposed, two claims were commonly made:

- (1) the proposal was "not as bad as it seemed" and
- (2) it would be "the last of its sort."

When that ploy eventually wore out, a new approach was taken; we were told that:

- (1) "it could be worse" and
- (2) "you can't stop 'progress'."

Now, the standard line is that:

- (1) provincial policy of "intensification" is at fault and
- (2) "there is no alternative" - the "TINA" made popular by Margaret Thatcher).

This will not do.

I will not speculate on the "horse-trading" and the "slight-of-hand" that is apparent behind the machinations involving the Baif development, the development at Coons' Rd. & Yonge, or any of the other sites being actively pursued for potentially catastrophic growth. It is not my intention to get "lost in the weeds" ... either figuratively or literally. I will also refrain from comments disputing the claims that the project here in question is environmentally benign or that the City will benefit from any "donations" of property from the owners to the public in return for a speedy passage of the amendment here sought. I trust that others will supply the empirical evidence based on hydrological studies (or will at least point to the inadequacy of the alleged evidence in support of the development plan.

Instead, I will speak to the *pattern*.

In 1984, the human population was officially said to be 6,000 with an alleged population limit of 6,500.

In 2016, the human population was officially said to be 38,140, almost 600% times the maximum carrying capacity of Ward 1.

That is a huge change by any reckoning.

In 2022 and the years to follow, it is plain that the intent of the provincial authorities, the development industry, and its reliable voices on Council have in mind numbers from 50,000 to 75,000 to 100,000 and quite possibly more - and sooner than anyone is prepared to imagine or to admit.

That portends an even greater change with ever more catastrophic consequences.

Meanwhile, *the ORM has not changed* - or, at least, not in a good way.

Therein lies the "challenge."

There was a time, you see, when people who called themselves "conservatives" were interested in "conservation," in protecting what was valuable and at risk. Now, people who call themselves "conservatives" are mainly interested in extracting short-term financial gain regardless of the consequences for others living or not yet living.

A phrase that was recently at least temporarily popular and most often attributed to Indigenous leader, Chief Seattle, went like this:

"We do not inherit the land from our ancestors, we *borrow* it from our children."

I would respectfully alter the phrasing to comport with current events and say:

"However we acquired the land matters less than the fact that we are now *ruining* it for our children."

I am confident that the "science" will be proven to trump "commerce" when a balance-sheet of private gains and public losses is calculated at some future point. *My* point, however, is that the calculus should not be one of transitory monetary gain, but of enduring environmental loss. This can, and should, be considered an ethical as well as economic question. It is a matter of morality as well as of money.

Two Platitudes

Very little in my experience leads me to believe that the proposal under consideration here and now will be rejected or sent back for serious revision. It would lighten my aging heart if some small measure could be taken to alter the application and it would gladden me immensely if this Council was prepared to substantially rethink the entire direction in which the destruction of the ORM is seemingly inexorable.

In admitting that the odds are against correcting the direction in which we are headed, I do not want to encourage the champions - open and hidden - of the current trend; but, I must confess that, even if *this application* is sent back for revision or rejected outright, it is unlikely that the *overall trend* will be in immediate jeopardy. It is that larger trend as much or more as this specific application that needs rather desperately to be addressed.

So, I would like to put before you (or those of you willing to think twice or even thrice about such matters) to take provisionally to heart a couple of quotations.

The first comes from *On the Ecclesiastical Polity* (1598) by Sir Richard Hooker. It was used by Canada's most beloved "conservative" philosopher, George Grant (1918-1988) to close the first chapter of his lamentation for Canada as he saw it coming increasingly under the influence of the American technological empire. Professor Grant (then the Chair of the Department of Religion at McMaster University) was of the opinion that mere material success was not the proper measure of virtue, justice, or the "good society." He believed that it is required of us to know the difference between good and evil and to stand up to the best of our ability for that which is good regardless of the outcome. So, he invoked Hooker to justify speaking out even in circumstances of impending defeat. He did so "if for naught else, then for this: that posterity may know we did not, loosely through silence, let things slip away as in a dream."

The second expresses much the same sentiment and was more succinctly put by the great American defense lawyer, Clarence Darrow, who said simply: "Lost causes are the only ones

worth fighting for." It's easier, after all, to resign oneself to the inevitable ... and more lucrative too.

The difficulty for us in the early part of the twenty-first century is that for the first time in our collective history, the capacity of the planet to remain a favourable habitat for our (and other) species. We have faced pandemics, ice-ages, famines and floods, and even the recent and ongoing threat of nuclear war. Now, however, we are confronted by what the French sociologist Edgar Morin has called a "polycrisis," a unique confluence of ecological, economic, political, and ethical "crises" that make it just slightly possible that the emergent "Anthropocene" era will be short-lived and that our fate will not be well-served.

Our darkest future will not come because we failed to perform the Biblical injunction to exercise "dominion" over the Earth, but we have done so in a horribly irresponsible manner. We have not just obeyed the admonition to "go forth and multiply," but we have done so in a manner that has precipitated the greatest mass extinction of plant and animal species since the dinosaurs took their leave about 65 million years ago. The difficulty is that the path we are taking makes it increasingly unlikely that there will even *be* a posterity with much interest in how we behaved at the time of our greatest *hubris* and our most imminent *nemesis*.

In this context, then, what I say and what you do about this or any other choice that comes before you may seem exceedingly small and without consequence regardless of the choice you make. As a community we have little power to solve what is properly understood to be a global question of survival; however, also as a community, we have little excuse to submit to the worst of our instincts.

All I will do, therefore, is invite you to *think* about what *you* are doing. And then to *do* the right thing.

I thank you for your attention.

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