

## **Township of Wilmot Council Presentation – March 25, 2024**

Good evening – Mayor Salonen, and members of Wilmot Township Council. My name is Alfred Lowrick and I am a resident in the Township of Wilmot and represent landowners affected by the proposed expropriation process as well as local concerned citizens of the area. As you know our landowner group was recently informed that their lands would be expropriated if an amicable settlement is not achieved. The lands in question are 770 acres prime farm land from Wilmot Centre to Nafziger Road south of Hwy 7&8 and north of Bleams Rd.

Our landowner's group were approached independently two weeks ago by a consultant the Region is using with an offer to purchase their farms. The timelines given for acceptance for this offer was a week later (March 20) which is absurd given the massive disruption to our lives this totally unexpected situation creates with a goal to reach full land acquisition by August of this year. Our core group of landowners rallied our limited resources quickly and have met daily to determine what can be done as we feel that this is an immense misuse of prime Wilmot Township farmland.

What is most upsetting is the lack of information these landowners and affected citizens received particularly from Regional Council where this presentation was made last week. All were willing to listen but we got no details and no answers to our questions. To clarify – our group is fully aware that this project has not been initiated at this local or even the regional level. Larger provincial funding pockets are obviously financing this, so we feel its this council and Region council's duty to at least hear concerns and be our voice to the project leads.

We fully understand the role of the non-disclosure agreements that you all signed for this project but to have a week go by and hear nothing is frustrating. This council and the regional government, are entrusted to advocate for their constituents and unfortunately all have been noticeably silent as no one really had any answers. We are pleased that this council made arrangements to hear our concerns.

Our initial landowner group has been expanded to include all affected citizens of the Wilmot Centre – Bleams Road – Nafziger Rd area. We brought this group up to speed on what has transpired and planning began in earnest. Many of these people are long-term farming families who located in the area due to the high quality of farmland and reassurance that lands like this, far from existing urban centres would not face development pressures. To say they were distraught and devastated is an understatement. What is worse is that this all came as a surprise to all of us. No formal notifications, meetings and consultations. The outcome of our meeting was that landowners are cohesively against this as a united front and we plan to engage the citizens of the larger New Hamburg/Baden municipality as this land acquisition will change the lifestyles and the social fabric of our community forever.

We are deeply concerned because this action by the Region of Waterloo is so incongruent with so many of their environmental, sustainability and climate change initiatives - as well as inconsistent with all long-term planning. Rumour has it that this land acquisition is for an industrial plant initiative. Again, no details on what is being contemplated but the size, scale, and absurd location of this plant could destroy our Region's visionary Countryside Line concept and make it impossible to reach essential Green House Gas emission reductions to meet our federal, provincial and regional Paris Accord commitments.

There is tremendous concern about climate change by the vast majority of Canadians who are expecting our governments to be stepping up with solutions - not undertaking activities that will make things far worse. We are already losing an unsustainable 300+ acres of farmland every day which will be catastrophic unless we quickly change our ways.

While there is always strong public support for new economic initiatives that will bring new, well-paying jobs to our communities, there is already considerable concern and confusion about the unusual and unexpected site being chosen by the Region for this industrial site. While this council might be thrilled to think the next Tesla Gigafactory could be coming to our municipality along with the tax base to grow the community it will however come with many negative social side affects. From an elected official perspective, I wouldn't underestimate how many people are horrified about it and the impacts it could bring to our rural township in this distant, challenging location. The vast majority of the public will want to see farmland protected and this factory located in a better site closer to the cities and with far less negative impacts.

We have a few questions which you may want to ponder and take forward to the project leaders:

- why is this industrial site being built on prime farmland rather than reclaimed aggregate sites, grey field, brownfield, or other already compromised locations that already abound in the Region and Township?
- why is the site being located outside of settlement boundaries and so far from our Regions major cities which will make our roadways even busier?
- why has there been no public engagement or even discussion about this particular location in all the extensive long-term planning the Region has undertaken?
- All remaining capacity at the New Hamburg/Baden sewage plant has already been allocated for residential growth and additional expansion will be extremely expensive if even possible because the Nith River watershed is already at its capacity,

- why has the GRCA not had any input in this planning?
- has anyone thought of the lack of significant highway/transportation access (except for Highway 7/8), or a rail line that is already heavily congested with passenger rail traffic? There is little possibility of public transit in this area forcing thousands of long automobile trips daily,
- what about water availability for these lands and if it would trigger the need for a pipeline to Lake Erie. One needs to remember that much of our Region's ground water comes from Wilmot township and water quality is already suffering,

People ask how much land is 770 acres which is the amount of land being expropriated? Growing up in Kitchener, I had no idea. Well, it's 8.5 km. around the perimeter of this property or approximately the distance from Kitchener City Hall to the St. Jacobs Market. That's a lot of land. If other large industrial plants are any indication, it will set off a chain reaction of much additional surrounding farmland loss for additional and ancillary uses - just look at the impact Honda has had on the destruction of thousands of additional acres of surrounding farmland for kilometers in every direction in Alliston, Ontario with additional factories, warehouses, logistics companies, etc. all of which needed to be close to the plant.

A similar story is unfolding in St. Thomas. Our landowner group went there last Monday and saw what has happened to 1,600 acres of farmland for the VW battery plant. We spoke to a farmer whose land is being expropriated and we noted that her story has so many of the same concerns that we are facing.

Clearly from our viewpoint regional staff haven't done enough of their homework and have made a really poor choice with this distant, constrained location lacking most of the essential infrastructure and features industrial purchasers will be seeking. So, I ask "WHY HERE???"

We look forward to working with you and the Region/Province to find far better solutions as there are numerous locations in Waterloo Region and the Township of Wilmot where this sort of development has always been anticipated, would be far more sustainable, and would be welcomed.

Thank you for letting us be heard.

**Alfred Lowrick**

On behalf of the affected Land Owners and concerned citizens of Wilmot Township.

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