

Follow-up from 1st Stakeholder Advisory Committee
Oak Park Road proposed Extension

April 16, 2021

Thank you for inviting the Brantford Ecoist Society to participate in the Oak Park Road extension Advisory Committee meeting held March 23, 2021.

At the end of the meeting, we requested clarification on what Brantford and Parson's means by "Advisory Committee" and "Stakeholder." It is our belief that you will state the Brantford Ecoist Society was "consulted" on the Oak Park road extension project through participation in the March 23 "stakeholder advisory committee."

For the record, as participants learned, we were not asked for our advice during the meeting. We were provided with most of the same information publicly available about the proposed road and given another opportunity to ask questions and express concerns. We also want to take this opportunity to remind you that we had questions which you (Parsons and the City of Brantford) were not able to answer.

Our primary concern is the Oak Park road extension is a project identified by the City of Brantford 30 years ago, in 1980. The only premise the city had for this proposed road at the time was a desire to link two areas that (at the time) were identified for annexation and development, primarily residential in the southwest, and industrial in the northwest.

When the Oak Park road extension was conceived, Brantford's booming manufacturing sector was just on its way to collapse, partly because of the recession of the 1980s, partly because of NAFTA and partly because of high interest rates. Nevertheless, the City of Brantford has continued to cling to the idea that economic salvation lies in the rebuilding of the industrial sector, albeit re-invented as a food processing centre. In short, the city is clinging to outmoded ideas, including the promotion of car culture. We feel the pursuit of construction of this road will only exacerbate existing problems.

Our secondary concern is that there is no specific problem delineated that this road extension would resolve. The construction of this road is based on projected traffic congestion woes, which we do not feel is a strong enough rationale for the project. Traffic congestion is endemic to all cities around the world, driven by car culture. Brantford's "problem" appears to be, judging from all information provided by the city and Parsons, impatient drivers; congestion at certain times of the day on certain days of the week as people travel to and from jobs; Brantford's failure to smooth traffic flow through the use of coordinated traffic lights and restricted parking on certain arterial roads during peak travel times of the day. City planning has not been focused on how to reduce reliance on personal vehicles. And all of this is complicated by the fact that Brantford is built on the banks of a river.

A third concern is future users of the proposed road have not been identified. When asked who would be using this road, there was no answer. From our perspective, Parsons has supported Brantford Council's decision to pursue the construction of the Oak Park road extension and bridge wholesale, but has failed to provide evidence that proves traffic congestion would be reduced or improved by either the expansion of existing roads or the creation of the Oak Park extension. The Brantford Ecoist Society has been learning that most studies done on traffic congestion demonstrate that new roads or expansion of existing roads only generates more traffic congestion. Los Angeles where traffic congestion is

immortalized, is now building high speed mass transit options for commuters, because constructing new roads has failed to ease congestion issues.

We strongly believe the true issue – which will not be addressed by the new road – is that Brantford’s population is increasing thanks to the influx of people from nearby cities who are drawn to the area’s relatively “affordable” housing prices. In other words, Brantford is becoming a “bedroom community” and many of these new residents continue to commute to their jobs in other cities.

Given that Brantford has become a bedroom community, and that new business growth in the city, particularly industrial, generates hundreds of low-paying insecure (temporary) “jobs” while gobbling up acres and acres of land per facility, we feel the construction of a new road and bridge is a misguided attempt to mask the realities of Brantford: ***this is a car-reliant city, and municipal leaders continually fail to move the city past reliance on personal vehicles.***

The City of Brantford recently pledged to address climate change, and it is this commitment we feel Brantford needs to build upon. Parsons Inc, in our opinion, needs to include in its environmental assessment the impacts of the new road in terms of climate change, which have been missing from the studies thus far. How much greenhouse gas emissions would potentially be generated by the construction and later use of the new road? How would this be offset? What is the cost – including eco-system and human health – of the new road extension?

Parson’s did promise during our meeting that it would work out some sort of environmental cost for the proposed road extension and bridge, and would recommend how many trees should be planted to compensate. But we adamantly feel this is the wrong approach – build now and offset later. All known environmental costs need to be a part of the environmental assessment and recommendations for the proposed road extension now in order to make an appropriate decision on whether or not to pursue this 30 year old idea.

Taking a deeper dive into this issue (as we should, it is a global issue and Canada has pledged to be Net Zero Carbon by 2050), we realize this “environmental assessment” for the Oak Park road and bridge extension only looks at the environmental impacts of this particular road and bridge. By this we mean that the project’s impacts are isolated from the greater context of development in the area. At present there are two massive developments under construction in Brantford – off of the new Shellard’s Lane and off of Hardy Road. The road will not exist in a separate bubble. In the near future, the Oak Park road extension will also facilitate the development in the area on what is now agricultural lands. In 50 years time, Brant Park will be an isolated semi-example of what the area used to be like.

More importantly, given the City’s commitment to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, how much carbon will the Oak Park road extension contribute to global climate change every single day once it is built and in use? And how much will it cost the city to offset these emissions ever single day? The city needs a plan, whether that means making the extension road a toll road and then putting funds collected to offsetting carbon. But we ask, is the true cost really worth the construction of this road? Is there not a better way?

We think there is a better way.

There is a case to be made for municipal leadership to lead greener development in Brantford. Planning to construct a road knowing full well it will contribute to increased urban sprawl is not progressive planning. What is needed in 2021 and into the future is growth that does not consume

naturalized and agricultural lands. We need growth that discourages urban sprawl. New construction should be eco-friendly and incorporate elements of LEEDs and other green design principles. Most importantly, we need to reduce this city's reliance on personal vehicles, because the transportation and oil and gas sector (which are so closely linked and interdependent in Canada right now) are the biggest contributors the greenhouse gas emissions in Canada (52% of all emissions in 2018), and we have recently learned that these emissions have been seriously under-estimated.

Following is our advice:

1. **Do not build a new road and bridge.** The world is facing a climate crisis and transportation, along with our dependency on oil and gasoline, are Canada's top contributors to global warming. Brantford needs alternatives, which might be a re-creation of the former streetcar system, or perhaps dedicated rail links to facilitate commuters while getting cars off the roads. While industrial development is hyper-focused on the 403, city planners should be incorporating work and living so that it is easier for people to walk or take public transit to work (think "15 minute neighbourhoods").
2. **Convert the lands** set aside for the Oak Park road extension **into parkland**; and take this a step further by taking the opportunity to re-naturalize these lands, and instead extend the trail up to Colborne Street where the road would have been built (and do not pave the entire trail, or if paving, use water-friendly paving materials. Paved trails are may be maintenance-friendly, but are not environmentally friendly).
3. Take this opportunity to **re-naturalize those lands**, particularly the southwest approach to the existing pedestrian bridge. Re-naturalized areas in Brantford are lacking. Indeed, re-naturalized lands are lacking in Southwestern Ontario, which has been reduced to less than 5% of original forest cover (pre-European settlement). The lack of biodiversity in Brantford is fostering the continuing wave after wave of tree-destroying insect invaders, such as Emerald Ash Borer and Gypsy Moth. It is now established that time spent in a naturalized setting has been found to be healing for people, and doctors in Ontario are now writing prescriptions for people to get outside to greener settings. Let's prescribe Brantford a healthy dose of nature! By the way, natural vegetation plays a vitally important role in the health of the Grand River, and given this is where we draw the majority of our drinking water, why wouldn't we want the river to be as healthy as possible?

Sincerely,

Stephanie Dearing
Chairperson
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