

VERNON MORNING STAR

LETTER: Say no to sprawl, Vernon

Eric Kowalski

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The 580 Commonage development proposes 4,000 homes. | 580 Commonage photo

Re: the May 22 article, Ambitious, 4,000 home development up for discussion.

Leonard Kerkhoff would have us believe that his company's proposed 4,000-unit development at 580 Commonage Road 'makes sense.' He claims that the burden to taxpayers is virtually nothing. All the roads and services will be at Kerkhoff's cost.

And yet, the reality of sprawl developments such as the one Kerkhoff is proposing – five kilometres from the downtown core in a rural, largely undeveloped area – is that the cost to taxpayers is

‘virtually nothing’ only if you focus on the immediate, short-term construction costs.

As the Strong Towns organization notes: “The cost of maintaining infrastructure doesn’t go away after construction—it only grows over time. Decades later, when pipes need replacing, roads need resurfacing, and public buildings need repairs, the original development fees are long gone, and the ongoing tax revenue isn’t enough to keep up. Cities then face a choice: raise taxes, take on debt, or chase even more growth to generate new revenue.”

This is aside from a host of other concerns, including lack of sustainable transportation options (4,000 homes added to a rural area means potentially thousands of more private automobiles crowding the roads – sprawl development does not provide the density required to support public transit), fragmentation of unique and fragile ecosystems, increased stress on already stressed regional water supply, gutting of downtown business districts, and other costs.

Perhaps of even greater concern, this proposal is being considered while the City of Vernon is in the midst of revising its current Official Community Plan (OCP).

Again, as with the consultation for the existing OCP, public feedback for the new OCP has indicated that further sprawl development is not what residents of this community want.

They particularly do not want to see further destruction of the Commonage.

It is difficult to understand why the city would even consider an amendment to the existing OCP – an amendment that would directly contradict key goals and objectives of that plan – when we are in the midst of developing of a new OCP.

If we continue to support sprawl developments such as the one being proposed, we are then continuing to kick the can of consequences down the road to our children and grandchildren.

We do know better – we need to collectively work with government at all levels and with the private and nonprofit sector to get serious about building the housing we need close to the downtown core.

Suburban sprawl may (possibly but not necessarily) temporarily make housing cheaper, but when a city sprawls every new house adds more to the public obligation to maintain. More pipes, more roads, more services.

Kerkhoff Develop-Build is putting a very attractive ‘spin’ on this proposal, but as the saying goes, ‘You can put lipstick on a pig, but it’s still a pig.’

In this case, the 'pig' is sprawl development, a 'pig' that is bad for city budgets, bad for taxpayers, bad for the environment and bad for the generations coming after us.

We have known this for decades, so let's get serious about building better and say no to sprawl!

Eric Kowalski

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