



Re: Airport Employment Growth District (“AEGD”) Secondary Plan, Zoning By-law and Infrastructure Master Plans (PED10153a/FCS10062a/PW10080) (City Wide)

**Response by Hamilton Chamber of Commerce to
City Council Economic Development & Planning Committee
September 30, 2010
(Check against delivery)**

Thank you Mr. Chairman and Councilors for this opportunity to address Committee on another crucial matter facing this Council - arguably another one of the most important single strategic issues facing this Committee this term.

First and foremost, Hamilton Chamber of Commerce enthusiastically applauds and supports the recommendations made by City Staff in this report and wishes to express our sincere gratitude for all of the hard work and extensive due diligence that they have collectively demonstrated in bringing this vital project this far. They should be particularly commended for the extensive and thorough public consultation that has led to this point. We strongly encourage Council to adopt the recommendations made in this report and proceed to transform them into immediate action. Collectively, these constitute nothing less than outstanding contribution to conform to the long term comprehensive strategy already mandated by Council, to ensure that the City of Hamilton will soon be able to take advantage of emerging opportunities for private sector jobs and prosperity growth, plus incidentally attract badly needed business assessment growth. This will clearly enable us to fulfill our vision to be *“the best City in Canada in which to raise a child, promote innovation, engage citizens, and provide diverse economic opportunities.”*

The Chamber believes that the fundamental foundation upon which all other aspects of our collective

community Vision can be built and sustained must be the establishment of a strong economic base. In order to lay that foundation, it is imperative that we, as a community, strive to achieve employment objectives to not only offset the job losses we have been experiencing over the past few decades, but to turn the corner and develop Hamilton as a community of sustainable job creation for the next 20-30 years or more.

We will not go into the details of the staff report, as believe that it clearly speaks for itself.

But, we do wish to report that our research indicates that the clear majority of Hamiltonians are in broad alignment. As you may recall, in May 2010, we commissioned an independent public opinion survey of City residents through the well-known and highly reputable firm of Hendershot Research Consultants. This study has a margin of error of less than 4%. In this survey, when asked, completely unaided by the way (i.e. in an “*open ended*” question), “*What the three most important issues in the community?*” 35% generally responded, “*Taxes*”; 29% “*Jobs/Prosperity*”; 23% “*Healthcare*” and 22% “*Downtown Core*”. Setting aside that “*health care*” is fundamentally a provincial issue; that means that a whopping 54% felt that “*Taxes*” and/or “*Jobs/Prosperity*” were amongst the top three areas of concern. To the Chamber, these two issues are reverse sides of the same coin, as to us; the City is facing huge fiscal challenges now, at the very least in large part, because Business Assessment has just not kept pace with population growth in Hamilton over the past 30 years.

You all know the figures!

In 1981, approximately 60% of City’s Revenues came from Business Assessment. Today, this now accounts for only 30% of City budgetary demands. Further, from 1981 to 2001, the population of what is now Hamilton City grew by a net of 19% – private sector job growth was a mere net 1% over the same period (thus, to us, it is not at all coincidental that we now have roughly a 20% poverty problem.) Similarly in/around 1981 about 30K to 35K net more workers commuted to Hamilton to work – now the complete reverse is sadly the case, making us, de facto, a bedroom community for neighbouring jurisdictions, who have experienced significant assessment growth – many of these businesses would have located/re-located here, if we had had employment lands available for them to suit their needs.

Bottom Line:

The City needs Business Assessment Growth, and Hamiltonians need jobs – soon! This must be the clear focus of Council – i.e. to do whatever we reasonably can to provide the private sector with a good inventory of shovel ready employment lands to provide meaningful opportunities to grow employment in Hamilton. As the staff report clearly indicates, the AEGD is a major investment that will help us get the kind of action that we need.

The Survey further confirms that the public is largely behind the broader direction of staff's recommendations. When asked "*Do you feel that the City should move ahead to develop prosperity surrounding the Airport to create jobs*"? 57% said, "Yes". Indeed, the number who favoured the AEGD versus the numbers opposed was a ratio of 1.6: one. Only 7% had no opinion. This is in stark contrast to a similar survey also conducted by Hendershot on this same issue in 2007, which indicated only 40% in favour versus 14% opposed, but with then 46% either indifferent or undecided. To us, this clearly indicates that support for the AEGD is both growing, and indeed solidifying, as Hamiltonians grow more and more concerned about employment opportunities.

Hamiltonians do indeed get it!

Incidentally, some try to make this an issue of so-called "*Brownfields*" versus "*Greenfields*". To us, this is a red herring. We fully agree and support intensification and revitalization of any under utilized employment lands. That is so obvious, that it should go without saying.

But this is no way negates the need for expanding our inventory of employment lands. There are many reasons for this, all of which have been provided in detail by staff and the City's consultants over the years. But fundamentally, let us reiterate but two:

1. You cannot "*force*" potential private sector employers (Clients, if you will) to locate where they do not feel it is in their best interests to locate, no matter how good that choice may perhaps be for the City (I cite the recent difficulties with the Ti-Cats as a simple illustration). To many employers, these sites will simply not suit their needs. If we have nothing else to offer them - they will go elsewhere. And, by the way, you cannot effectively ask them to simply wait say 4-

5 more years while you bring more lands into your inventory. Simply put, to be a successful. We need a full selection of employments lands. Too many businesses have wanted already to locate here in the past, and have leapt frogged over us to bring badly needed jobs and assessment to other communities because we simply did not have the inventory of product that they wanted or needed.

2. The staff and consultants research have clearly demonstrated repeatedly that there is simply insufficient under utilized sites in Hamilton to create the levels of employment growth that we need. E.g. if the Provincial "*Places to Grow*" expectations for Hamilton's population growth to 2031 are even close to being correct, our calculation is that we will need a minimum of 95,000 net new jobs just to stay where we are. If we do wish to come close to closing the poverty gap, we may well need more than double that amount. No matter how much you way want to "*intensify*" (and we fully agree they need to), there is simply no way we can accommodate all of that kind employment growth in just our older industrial areas.

Obviously, we are in agreement with our Past-President Ed Fothergill in that the current plan is far too little to meet the opportunity needs out to 2031 and beyond. However, to us, time is of the essence. So, we are willing to adapt to the current staff proposals as an interim reasonable compromise to allow us to simply "Get on with it!"

In summary, we need the AEGD and soon.

Let's simply get on with it!