



Peoples Official Plan Coalition / Le Plan Officiel Populaire

To: Councillor Jeff Leiper, Chair of the Planning and Housing Committee
From: Peoples Official Plan Coalition
Subject: Urban Boundary

Dear Councillor Leiper,

Following the Province's unprecedented reversal of its decision to add expansion lands to Ottawa's urban area, the City has been given 45 days to bring forward changes and updates to the Official Plan approved by Council in 2021. The City has an opportunity to review its intensification targets and strategy, and make different choices regarding urban expansion. There are compelling reasons to do so.

Since the last Council considered the issue, there have been significant changes to provincial housing policy brought through Bill 23. Measures permitting more housing density as of right and the introduction of associated development charge exemptions work together to favour growth through intensification rather than more urban sprawl. In addition, federal funding to municipalities for housing is increasingly tied to the adoption of zoning that promotes greater density as of right in built up areas. In light of these fundamental changes in the planning context, it behooves Council to consider the big picture.

Other factors have also fundamentally changed the context for this decision. There is a heightened public awareness of the ethical concerns surrounding the process of urban expansion and site selection, as evidenced by investigations launched by the provincial Auditor General and Integrity Commissioner and by the RCMP. The imminence and scale of the climate emergency and the housing and homelessness emergency also underline the need to reset the decision-making process on land use. Last but not least, we have a new Mayor and Council.

The Peoples Official Plan coalition described below has long advocated for accommodating all projected growth through intensification, spreading this densification equitably across the built up parts of the city, organizing land use around walkable, equitable, inclusive and green neighbourhoods, and connecting people and goods through safe and efficient public transit and active transportation networks. This approach would be more financially sustainable.

This aligns well with the Term of Council Priorities for 2023-2026. They aim to have a city that:

- has affordable housing and is more liveable for all;
- is more connected with reliable, safe and accessible mobility options;
- is green and resilient;

- has a diversified and prosperous economy.

We are asking you, as Chair of the Planning and Housing Committee, to ensure that all urban expansion options, including the no-expansion scenario included in the May 11 2020 staff report on Growth Management, are on the table as part of the Committee's deliberations regarding the City's response to the Minister's request, whether it be through an Official Plan update or by whatever process is specified by the Minister.

Secondly, we also ask that the deliberations of your Committee include a review of the timing and financial implications of the implementation of any approved expansion. In our view, the financials on sprawl have shifted due to recent legislation, construction cost inflation as well as increasing risk and maintenance costs due to climate impacts. Responsible financial management – surely an obligation of council – may show that planned boundary expansions are not financially sustainable in the medium run and should therefore be paused or significantly slowed in implementation.

This new council will wear the urban boundary decision for generations to come. For this reason, it is important that all of Council be engaged. A fulsome review would also help restore public trust.

Sincerely,

The People's Official Plan Coalition

The Peoples Official Plan (POP) coalition is composed of over 20 not-for-profit organizations representing tens of thousands of Ottawans. We advocate at Ottawa City Hall for better transit, greater walkability and active transportation, greenspace for all, housing equity, climate change mitigation and adaptation, equity and inclusion, sustainable waste management, and food security, all sought through ethical city planning practices.