

PRESENTATION TO BURLINGTON CITY COUNCIL  
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 28/07 (Cathryn Ainslie)

There are 12 billion ha of arable land on the earth's surface and 6.5 billion people on it, giving us 1.90 ha each if we were to all live a sustainable lifestyle. However, even the average world citizen does not live a sustainable lifestyle, using 2.8 ha each. Canadians are major offenders in driving up this world figure. According to the City of Burlington website, the average Canadian's Ecological Footprint (EF) is 7.25 ha. )This means that every Canadian needs 7.25 ha of land and water each, to produce the resources consumed and absorb the wastes generated.) But, the third worst offenders in Canada are the people of Halton, with an EF of 8.76 (over 4 times what it should be. The only two places worse than us are Calgary and Edmonton.)

Obviously we in Burlington have a direct responsibility for the damage being done to our planet. The single most important action to reduce our EF is to cut energy consumption, as it's 55% of Canada's EF (35% of which is for transportation). One way to cut energy is to encourage activities that aren't dependent on it, like organized sports, walking, and enjoying nature. The parklands for these activities must be within walking distance so that people aren't climbing in their cars to get to them. In an Evergreen survey of per capita spending on Parks and Recreation across 20 cities in Canada, Burlington was 3 from the bottom.

Have you seen Al Gore's The Inconvenient Truth? His stats show that 10 of the last 14 years are the hottest on record, 2005 being the hottest. CO2 emissions cause the Greenhouse Effect. To reduce them, we need to drive our cars less, and value our trees more because of their ability to absorb them. We need parkland in Burlington, accessible by foot in order to do this.

However, according to the 2004 Evergreen Report on the Results of a Nation-wide Survey, Burlington falls well below the Canadian averages for parkland hectares per 1000 people. The Canadian average is 9.2 ha/ 1000 and the median is 6.1 ha/1000. The average goal of over half the cities surveyed was 2.79 ha/1000. Oakville's ratio of municipal public open space is 8.4 ha/ 1000, and its recommended goal is 2.75. However, according to the City of Burlington Report on the Disposition of General Brock High School, Burlington's goal is 2.5 ha/1000 population.

But, "The Lakeshore Planning District has 99.44 ha of parkland and the 2001 Census showed 40,671 people lived in the district. This equates to a parkland standard of 2.4449/ha/1000 population, only reached by including Sherwood Park in the Lakeshore Planning District, too long a distance for people living near Guelph Line. (As is recognized where it says its "geographic alignment (wide and shallow) is a limiting factor for the residents near and around (it)." Hence, Burlington citizens, especially those living in the Lakeshore Planning District) are under-serviced by accessible parkland.

The mission statement from the city website states: The Corporation of the City of Burlington will be a leader in making a high level of environmental performance one of

the primary goals for its policies, programs and operations through protecting and enhancing the natural environment so as to achieve the highest quality of life for its citizens of today and tomorrow.

My question is, will there be money in the Capital Budget for preserving neighbourhood parkland in the City of Burlington? Will you vote to adopt Councilor Dennison's idea of a Strategic Land Purchase fund, and for a significant amount of money to go into it?

When the STTOP committee asked each of you to give your views on the importance of greenspace and its stewardship, this is what you said:

Mayor Jackson: "Burlington's long range planning should be strengthened in relationship to the stewardship of green spaces. Park dedication funds should be spent more equitably throughout the city. People should not open their newspaper to discover their local park is being sold to developers."

Councilor Craven: "Of course, we need to preserve as much play/green space as possible. But we must do so within the budget restrictions that we face. (...) Parks and open spaces are critically important for a healthy, balanced community.

Councilor Thoem: "I am a useless tourist in a place like New York because all I want to do is go to the park."

Councilor Taylor: "I supported the partial naturalization of Cavendish Park, development of Kerncliff Park- Burlington's first Environmental Park. I am also currently working on a rehabilitation plan for Nelson Aggregate.

Councilor Dennison: "Adequate play fields are a must for the adult and youth of the city of Burlington. (...) I will continue to push for the establishment of a Strategic Land Purchase account to be funded from the tax base and from any other source: bonusing, donations, sponsorships, naming rights that could become available."

Councilor Goldring: "I certainly would advocate the financial logic of maintaining greenspace. Trees and greenspace can make a difference in the value of homes by 20% according to some studies. In addition, we have the environmental benefits of greenspace and trees like reduction of air pollution and a reduction of air temperature in the summer.

Councilor D'Amelio: "I would protect public parks owned by the City of Burlington. In situations where greenspaces are owned by other orders of government, I would work with city staff to achieve some preservation of green space providing it is needed and affordable."

You are in the enviable position of not only holding views about the importance of green space but also being in a position to actually do something about them. You have the opportunity take a leadership role in some of the major issues driving our lives in the world today: the unsustainability of heavy Ecological Footprints, the worry of climate

change due to Greenhouse Effect, and the disappearance of our greenspace and trees. These are world problems, but they are going to be solved locally, municipality by municipality, in the places that have the will to accept the responsibility for them. You have a chance to show vision and leadership that could become a model for other the communities across Canada.

Councilor Goldring, I was heartened by what you said in the latest issue of City Talk: I will certainly be advocating that environmental leadership be the main tenet of the Strategic Plan.

With all due respect, I say the place to start is to allocate funds in the Capital Budget to environmental initiatives that maintain greenspace. Enthusiastically support a Strategic Land Purchase fund so there is a base of money that can be added to each year, and can be borrowed against when parkland (like General Brock Park) comes onto the market.

*(Figures taken from City of Burlington website, reached by googling "City of Burlington Environment" then choosing Ecological Footprint. Also, figures are from the Evergreen website, reached by googling "Green Space Acquisition and Stewardship in Canada's Urban Municipalities" & also from the City of Burlington Report # PR61/05, section 4.1 and Parks, Open Spaces & Trails Analysis (June 8, 2005.Oakville)*