

Voters can choose to reject sprawl

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Citizens in the 905 have a big opportunity on municipal election day. On Oct. 24, voters can choose to reject sprawl, which results in higher housing prices, longer car commutes and the continued loss of more than 300 acres of farmland per day.

What the Ford government and sprawl-backed municipal politicians did not see coming was a grassroots movement across southern Ontario, urging our governments to get on with building denser, more walkable, lower-cost and transit-supportive communities — within our existing neighbourhoods.

Voters can look for and find candidates advocating anti-sprawl policies.

In the 905, grassroots organizers started #StopSprawl groups in many areas, including Durham, York, Peel, Hamilton and Halton.

Two of these campaigns have successfully convinced the Halton and Hamilton councils to save our Class 1 and 2 farmland from land speculators by mobilizing thousands of citizens to write to their politicians.

Citizens, once opposed to growth in our neighbourhoods, now are calling for increased neighbourhood density to save our farmland, lower emissions, and save future tax dollars.

Embracing change for the better means turning our existing car-dependent subdivisions into “15-minute communities,” and making efficient use of the land within our existing urban boundaries.

Beginning soon after it took office, the Ford government began twisting the province’s land use planning rules to benefit the influential land speculators who’ve spent decades buying up the province’s best remaining farmland betting on zoning changes to reap massive profits.

Ford’s pro-speculative policies lowered densities so that new development would be large McMansions instead of affordable options.

Ford acted against the recommendations of his own Housing Affordability Task Force, which called for allowing middle density to be built everywhere.

Montreal is one Canadian example of a city with affordable housing and rental options, excellent transit, safe cycling infrastructure and abundant green space. These successes are due to medium density existing in almost all areas of Montreal.

Density is key. We need to ensure that more homes are built within our existing boundaries so transit offers service so frequent that we don’t need to check a schedule.

With middle density neighbourhoods throughout our communities, small businesses can offer small groceries, cafes, and restaurants in pockets around our communities.

Residents should not need a car to drive downtown for a coffee, to pick up some bread, head to a cafe for lunch, or drop off their kids when they’re late for school. We desperately need the health benefits, reduced flood risk and access to locally grown food that come with growing within our communities.

Halton Region for years has had thousands of acres of green fields already slated for growth and sitting unused. We should be developing that land at medium densities with lower-cost townhomes, semi-detached homes and other land-efficient family housing, so we don’t need to capitulate to land speculators looking for an excuse to bulldoze farmland.

Hamilton has a huge footprint and lots of underutilized lots that could easily be converted to allow affordable housing options. Most GTA households can’t afford a single family home and the 905 has plenty

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already. Don’t convert existing homes to McMansions; instead building quality built townhomes, semi-detached houses, duplexes and triplexes will bring needed density and help with lowering massive infrastructure debts incurred by our sprawling ways of the past.

Sprawl costs us all, through increased taxes and escalating food prices.

We do need more housing options and the good news is that our communities will be better places to live if we accommodate growth within our existing boundaries.

This election year we need to know clearly that 905 candidates are not beholden to land speculators and are putting citizens first. Land use planning is the single best lever municipalities have to lock in or lock out emissions.

Ask your favourite municipal candidate if they are willing to protect our farmland in perpetuity. Our children and grandchildren deserve affordable, walkable neighbourhoods with access to close farmland.

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