

Wendy and Thomas Maloney



Re: CSOPS.24.018, Deputation, Committee of the Whole, April 30, 2024

This deputation addresses:

- A) Traffic flow, in particular the developer's desire to place two of three access points on Peel St. S. into the Campus of Care, severely disrupting an existing neighborhood and threatening public safety;
- B) The rush to develop the Campus at the expense of coordinated planning with the province, county and local stakeholders;
- C) Costs of service into existing private lots, and property depreciation;
- D) Compromise of the Strategic Priority No. 1, i.e., to "enhance communications and engagement between Town Staff, Town residents and stakeholders."

## **TRAFFIC**

There are two infrastructure issues regarding Peel St. S, and the Campus of Care, and it is only right to consider them separately:

- 1) Water/wastewater installation;
- 2) Traffic flow.

Sewer and water pipes can be installed on Peel St. S. and Alice St. without taking down mature trees and infringing on existing properties.

Traffic should not be allowed to flow into an existing neighborhood, no matter how such design might convenience Skyline, the Campus of Care developer.

The Town completed a Transportation Master Plan only 17 months ago, in December of 2022, at significant cost of staff and consultant time.

There are exactly three mentions of the Campus of Care in that 162-page report.

Not once was Peel St. recommended as an access point to the Campus. Nor should it have been.

An estimated 300 vehicles per day would travel on Peel into the Campus, according to the WT Infrastructure Power Point which was read during a March 7, 2024 Microsoft Teams meeting.

The traffic estimate is wildly conservative. Would a true 24-hour estimate range up to 1,000 vehicles/day?

The Campus blueprint provides for about 800 parking spaces, and there would be innumerable visitors, trades and service people entering and leaving the Campus on a daily basis.

Presently the design calls for one access point off Grey Rd 113/10<sup>th</sup> Line and two off Peel St. S. That design can be reformed by adding another access point off Grey Rd 113 and possibly another off Hwy 26. Grey Rd. 113 is designated as a future Thornbury bypass. It's logical to use that street rather than a street in an existing quiet neighborhood where children live.

Peel St. S., along with Baring St. and Alice St. and all other streets in the neighborhood lying directly east of the Campus, should be protected from an invasion of traffic at all costs. As is, Alfred, Napier and Duncan streets could also be forced to bear the burden of Campus traffic.

At a recent Committee of the Whole meeting, following a presentation by Mr. Paul Reale, Councillors were close to passing a motion that Staff be instructed to provide a report about traffic flow into the proposed Lora Greens development adjacent to Hwy 26 on the north side, between 10th Line and Peel. That developer has stated that no improvements are required for the main access point, the intersection of 26 and Grey Rd 113.

Yet the 125 Peel staff report states that "a Transportation Operations and Impact Study is also being undertaken to consider the effects of the Campus of Care Development. The study is currently underway but not completed. The study includes an analysis of existing traffic conditions, traffic forecasts for a 10-year horizon (2033), and an assessment of traffic impacts for the entire area. The first draft of the study recommends ... 2) Traffic signal control should be considered at the intersection of Hwy 26 and 10th line/CR 113 (Traffic signals are warranted under 2033 forecast total traffic conditions), this is consistent with the Transportation Master Plan."

## **THE RUSH and its CONSEQUENCES**

Despite two years of Campus planning, the Active Transportation Study and Traffic Impact Study are still "underway".

The report also indicates that a full arborist's report hasn't been submitted.

Given that situation, how is it possible to proceed to the next step, with design, at this stage?

Moreover, the Premier of Ontario, Doug Ford, has stated this month: *"We are not going to go into communities and build four-storey or six-storey buildings beside residents. It's off the table for us."*

Yet, the Town, in lockstep with Skyline and the Province, is proceeding full-steam-ahead with a project that mushroomed from two buildings at the gestation stage into nine multi-storey buildings as of the May 17, 2023 staff report signed by CAO Shawn Everitt -- six of which would be higher than three storeys.

Where is the needs study as the basis for this project? Where is the research about the sociological and cultural impacts of squeezing some 1,000 people, or 25% of Thornbury's present population, onto 18 acres (up from 14.8 acres)?

Canada is suffering a family-doctor shortage crisis with no resolution in sight. How will the Town attract doctors, nurses and other medical/dental professionals including mental-health practitioners? Do local hospitals have the capacity to treat more patients? Where will social service workers come from? Are the schools able to absorb more students? Daycare workers? There's a shortage of recreational facilities in Thornbury as is – no pool, no publicly financed gym, few basketball courts, room for maybe two full-size soccer fields at the Tomahawk complex. How many more staff will the Town be forced to hire to handle all the needs?

What architectural and density precedents are being established by Council?

*Council: What are the plans?*

I worked as an editorial department head at The Globe and Mail, lastly with the Drive section for six years. During that time, we focused coverage on the future of transportation, to the point of staging annual conferences which are being conducted to this day.

The Transportation Master Plan deals lightly if at all with the future of driving with electric and autonomous vehicles.

In Thornbury West, where at least four developments including the Campus are planned, the Town in conjunction with Grey County and the MTO have opportunity to model roads, bike paths and walkways for the future with coordinated, cooperative planning and design.

The TMP and 125 Peel staff report do focus intently on Active Transportation. In Germany and other countries, cycling paths are set aside from the roads used by motorized vehicles. Here, the TMP proposes to go with the tired North American way of using the same roads for bicycles, scooters, cars, trucks, and other vehicles.

Alice and Peel streets are designated as active transportation corridors. In that case, at the very least, restrict access and speeds of motorized vehicles for the sake of public safety.

Staff recommends closing Alice St. W. between Baring and Peel streets. This recommendation should absolutely be followed as a public safety measure, otherwise vehicle traffic will flow to and from the Campus heavily along Alice St., as drivers seek to avoid a congested Hwy 26.

## **COSTS**

The dedicated web page about the Campus remains woefully shy of facts, cost estimates and up-to-date information.

If the infrastructure capital costs overtake the budget, as routinely occurs, who will bear the burden? What are the estimates?

- Depreciation: In an email to me dated March 19, 2024, senior capital projects manager Mike Humphries wrote that Peel St S infrastructure and reconstruction were “contemplated in the Development Charges Background Study going back more than 10 yrs. The DCBS’s from 2014, 2018 and 2024 all denote this section of Peel St South as an “Urban Collector” to be reconstructed with 8.5m asphalt road, concrete curb and gutter, storm sewer, concrete sidewalk, streetlights and street trees.”

When the residents along Peel St. and the surrounding neighborhoods were investing hundreds of thousands of dollars into their properties, and likewise those in the High Bluff and Lora Bay neighborhoods who will be affected by traffic congestion, did the Town ever inform stakeholders about the plan for Peel St.?

When taxpayers applied and paid for building permits, when they used real estate agents to acquire properties, was that information dispensed? Were we all expected to know about the Development Charges Background Study?

- In the response to neighborhood concerns about property depreciation, Staff have written (Item 10, March 24 staff report, 125 Peel Street Servicing Project – Public Information Centre #1):

***"Town staff are not certified real estate appraisers and cannot speculate on the impacts to property values resulting from reconstruction work."***

There are many real estate professionals working the area fully capable of evaluating the financial impact inflicted by a massive complex and associated traffic flow. Property owners should be compensated accordingly.

No one who purchased homes in the area could rightly have anticipated that the Town would be converting farmland into a project of this magnitude.

- This month, Council endorsed policy that permits up to three residential units on a single serviced lot.

However, the associated costs are contradictory.

In addition to construction and renovation costs, the properties on Peel, Baring and Alice would require wastewater and/or water service installations. According to the WT Infrastructure report, presented on March 7, the cost of the sanitary component alone ranges up to \$50,000, with gravity cost adding up to \$15,000 and pumping up to \$20,000, for a potential cost of \$85,000 at today’s prices. With or without adding residential units, that cost is simply unbearable, no matter how it may be subsidized or deferred.

This massive infrastructure project is being undertaken solely because of the 125 Peel project. Therefore, the costs of servicing the private lots along Baring, Alice and Peel should be assumed wholly by the Town, and incorporated into the 125 Peel budget.

## **COMMUNICATION**

Every Town staff report lists Strategic Priorities, with this being No. 1:

“Communication and Engagement: We will enhance communications and engagement between Town Staff, Town residents and stakeholders.”

Yet, in the March 22, 2024 Staff report, which is a response to concerns raised by the community, this is written:

“It is not Town Policy to send written notice when staff reports concerning a specific area of the community are being considered. A dedicated project web page for the 125 Peel Street Servicing project was published to the Town’s website in July 2023. At this time, an email was sent to 47 individuals subscribed at the time to the Town’s “125 Peel Street – Community Campus of Care” Development Project web page to notify them of the servicing project. Following the award of the servicing project engineering contract, the Town’s consultant has been working on the necessary background studies needed to inform the project.”

The Town’s website is designed for residents who are looking for specific information – for instance, when garbage will be picked up during a holiday week, how to register for parking passes, the days of the week the landfill will be operating.

It wasn’t designed, nor do people use it regularly for information on Town projects. The Facebook page, though, was designed for more proactive communication.

This project stands to have enormous consequences for the entire Town. Rather than pursuing a policy of proactive, transparent communication, the Town has instead negotiated the Campus behind closed doors, failing to solicit input from the public through town hall meetings and the like.

Such meetings were conducted during the political campaigns prior to the latest election. Instead, between the January 17, 2022 Special Meeting of Council to approve the Disposition of Lands, and March 7, 2024 when a small group of residents were gobsmailed to hear what had developed in the interim, there was precious little information emanating from the Town.

It’s an unacceptable failure of either the Communications department, or Town leadership instructing the Communications department to remain passive.

Let us review some history:

A January 17, 2022 staff report by CAO Shawn Everitt recommended that Council begin the process to sell the 125 Peel property to a developer in order to accommodate a long-term-care facility..

<https://pub-bluemountains.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=8294>

The report also recommended a public meeting on Feb 7 to accept comments from the public. Instead, via public notice, people were invited to send comments to the Town Clerk. A public meeting did not take place.

The prior Council also rejected public representation on a Campus steering committee, instead restricting the committee to two Councillors, and bestowing the responsibility for communication on one of those Councillors.

Over early '22, the scope of the project widened with neither public engagement nor proactive releases from the Communications dept.

At a March 2 Council meeting, Councillor Paula Hope suggested that two members of the community be brought into the task force.

Then-Mayor Soever's response: *"I sincerely hope it doesn't go the way of the previous senior's living five-storey building [which had been proposed for the former Foodland property near City Hall]. Community engagement killed that – community engagement has killed a lot of good projects in this community."*

That philosophy has characterized the Town's communication efforts regarding the Campus.

On March 29, 2022, staff recommended to Council that the land be formally designated as surplus to the Town's needs, a procedural step enabling TBM to sell the property to a developer. The public would only have known about this progression through this staff report or through the Committee of the Whole:

<https://pub-bluemountains.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=9622>

On March 30, the Mayor and then-Councillor Andrea Matrosovs met with BVO's Seniors Without Walls, via a technologically troublesome teleconference. An estimated 25 people were on the call.

Still, via questions, the listeners learned more about the project than has been revealed. For example:

-- Mayor Soever indicated not one but two 6-storey buildings may be built, as zoning exceptions to the master plan, Mayor Soever claimed that these buildings will not set a precedent. (Now there are 9 multi-storey buildings planned).

-- While the province would fund 3-storey buildings, the RFP is to focus on 6-storey buildings. Why, he was asked? "Economics," Mayor Soever said. Whose economics? he was asked. His two-fold answer: Six-storey buildings are more profitable for private long-term care operators, and room rent would be \$100/month less expensive.

-- As to the lack of communication to date at the time, then-Councillor Matrosovs said: "We have an excellent communication plan in place so they know how to reach out to groups."

That did not occur. That purposeful lack of communication has characterized the Campus of Care project from the beginning.

The Town's Facebook page has not been utilized to provide regular updates. Emails have not been used to provide regular updates.

Had the community been properly engaged according to the Town's mandate, soliciting input in the process, we may have arrived at a meaningful consensus. Instead, neighbors are alarmed and most taxpayers are ignorant about the implications of the Campus of Care.