

Melissa Herod

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Dear Members of the Council,

My name is Melissa Herod, and today I stand before you not just on my own behalf, but as the voice of many in our community who cherish The Town of the Blue Mountains deeply. We are united in our affection for the town's natural beauty and our commitment to maintaining its safety and environmental integrity. The current plans for servicing 125 Peel Street South, including the construction of a multi-use trail and the extensive removal of our beloved trees, touch the very core of what we hold dear in our community.

I am here to share my deep concerns about the lack of crucial information on this proposal. Decisions that could reshape our community are being made without clear, accessible, and complete information — some of which seems to have been withheld from us. To my knowledge, some citizens have had to resort to filing Freedom of Information requests in pursuit of transparency. It is crucial that our community's future is shaped by informed choices, grounded in a thorough and honest understanding of all potential impacts. We deserve no less from our elected officials.

1. Multi-use Trail Concerns:

I'm deeply worried about the proposed multi-use trail along Peel Street South. This project raises serious safety concerns that we cannot overlook.

Safety and Traffic Concerns: Every day, the proposal expects up to 300 cars to travel on Peel Street South, a road also intended for substantial pedestrian and cyclist use. Introducing heavy traffic alongside the trail not only increases the risk of accidents involving our residents, especially near the Campus of Care and local driveways, but also introduces a hazard that is unprecedented in our community. We're being asked to navigate a space where cars, bikes, and pedestrians must coexist in dangerously close quarters.

Critical Connectivity Issues: The trail is designed to connect Peel Street South to Peel St North. Yet, this plan forces trail users to face a very dangerous decision: attempt to cross Highway 26, where cars move at speeds of 70km/hour without any safety or traffic calming measures, or turn back the way they came. This design blatantly disregards the essential elements of connectivity and safety as outlined in Section 8.3.2 of our Master Transportation Plan. I am compelled to ask: Why is our town planning to implement a

project that seems to contradict its own established guidelines for safe and connected transportation?

Impact on Local Residents: The proposed location of the multi-use trail directly in front of our homes is deeply troubling. This plan threatens the peaceful enjoyment of our properties by introducing a constant stream of vehicles, cyclists, and pedestrians right at our doorsteps. Particularly concerning is the trail's adjacency to the road, where it crosses the Campus of Care entrance and residential driveways. This creates a unique and serious safety hazard where cars crossing the trail can hit pedestrians and cyclists, a situation that is unprecedented anywhere else in the Town of Blue Mountains. The complete lack of discussion regarding alternative trail placements or even the consideration of relocating the trail underscores a significant failure in thoughtful planning and genuine engagement with us, the residents. We urgently call for a reassessment of the trail's placement to ensure our safety and preserve the quality of life in our community.

Suggested Alternative Design: In response to these concerns, we strongly urge the consideration of Grey Rd 113/10th line as a core route for active transportation, rather than just a general route. This area, devoid of residential buildings, trees, or homes that could be adversely affected, presents a safer and more suitable alternative for the multi-use trail. Moreover, the intersection of Grey Rd 113/10th line and Highway 26, already a known hotspot for traffic accidents and tragically the site where our fellow Thornbury resident Leslie Bettie lost his life, necessitates urgent safety measures. Installing a traffic light at this intersection would not only enhance safety for trail users crossing the highway but also align with the Master Transportation Plan's goals for improved connectivity and safety in our active transportation network. This change would address critical safety concerns and show a commitment to protecting our community's well-being.

2. Clear Cutting of Mature Trees:

I also would like to express grave concerns regarding the proposed clear-cutting of trees associated with the servicing of 125 Peel Street South.

Extent of Tree Removal: The proposal includes the clear-cutting of well over 100 trees, with only a small percentage identified as being in poor or dead condition within the town's right of way. However, we don't know the exact number because the tree inventory and tree protection plan have not been completed and/or released to the public. This substantial reduction in tree cover not only impacts the aesthetic and environmental quality of the area but also diminishes the habitat for local wildlife and the overall canopy coverage in the town.

Tree Protection Zone Compliance: There are notable discrepancies in the GIS/Topographical surveys presented by town staff, specifically regarding the delineation of property lines and the town's right of way. These inaccuracies necessitate an independent review to ensure that all planning is conducted within legal bounds and with accurate data.

It is imperative to recognize the importance of Ontario's guidelines for tree protection zones, particularly the 10-meter distance from the drip line. These zones are vital for maintaining tree health and stability by safeguarding essential root systems.

I also want to draw attention to another concerning issue. There are five old maple trees at risk of being lost because there's been no mention of protecting their drip lines in the plans. The drip line is crucial for these trees' health, as it's where their roots gather essential nutrients and water. Ignoring this protection puts these trees at risk of severe root damage and can lead to their decline or even failure.

Any construction or development within these zones can lead to severe root damage to all the trees outside of the town's right of way, compromising the long-term viability of the trees.

Compliance with Environmental and Forestry Legislation: The tree removal process must align with The Forestry Act (Ontario) and other applicable environmental and forestry legislation.

Furthermore, compliance with industry standards such as the Ontario Professional Foresters Association's Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice is essential. These standards emphasize the use of independent assessments by qualified arborists and surveyors to ensure decisions are based on accurate, unbiased information and a comprehensive understanding of environmental impacts.

Suggested Alternative Design: A comprehensive Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is necessary to thoroughly assess the broader ecological effects of the proposed tree removal and construction activities related to the trail development. This assessment should explore alternative trail alignments that minimize environmental disruption and prioritize the preservation of mature trees. Such an evaluation will help ensure that the development aligns with sustainable environmental practices and community values, fostering a design that harmonizes with the natural landscape while mitigating negative impacts.

In addition to the broader community concerns already highlighted, I'd like to share a deeply personal issue that directly affects my family and me. The proposed future roundabout for Peel Street and Highway 26, as outlined in the report, would necessitate the expropriation of my property. You can only build on the south side of Highway 26 where my

home is because on the north side you have the Little Beaver River. This potential loss of our home, where we have built countless memories and fostered community ties, adds a significant personal stake to the decisions being made here today. The idea of losing our home, where my family has grown and created lifelong memories, is heart-wrenching. These aren't just planning decisions; they change the lives of real people. It's so important that these decisions are made openly and with great care, and that those of us who are affected are treated fairly and with compassion. Our situation is a stark reminder of how deeply community changes affect us all, tearing at the very fabric of our lives and our neighborhood.

ASK FOR COUNCIL

Can the council confirm the exact number of trees affected by this development? Why has the arborist's report not been released for public scrutiny?

Can the council confirm whether all environmental impact assessments, including the tree inventory, are complete? Why are they not being made available for public scrutiny?

Has a comprehensive traffic flow analysis been conducted that integrates simulations of both vehicular and pedestrian traffic during peak hours, incorporating the findings from the Traffic Impact Study and the Active Transportation Study? If so, how are these findings synthesized to address the safety concerns at the proposed development intersections?

Has a professional safety audit been requested from MTO specifically assessing the risks associated with the trail's crossings at Highway 26?

REQUEST OF COUNCIL:

In the face of such significant changes and impacts associated with this project, I ask the council directly: Can you guarantee that all environmental and traffic impact assessments strictly comply with current regulatory standards? If these assessments are indeed comprehensive, why have they not been openly shared with the public for thorough scrutiny and feedback?

The absence of this critical information is deeply troubling. It casts a shadow on our ability to make informed decisions that affect the lives and safety of our residents. How can we move forward without full transparency? How can we trust decisions made in the dark? Do we take leaps of faith?

We, as a community, place immense value on transparency and accountability. These are not just principles we uphold; they are the foundations upon which our trust in your elected leadership rests. I urge you to consider the weight of our concerns and the depth of our need for complete clarity. Please, let us pause this project. Let's ensure that every resident and every official has access to all the necessary information to make truly informed decisions about our town's future.