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Town of the Blue Mountains

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May 8, 2024

RE: *CSOPS.24.018 125 Peel Street South Servicing*

Deputation Request, Monday May13, 2024

Dear Madame Chair and Councillors,

I am here both as a concerned citizen, and to be a voice for many in our community who find themselves deeply troubled by the proposed servicing at 125 Peel Street South. Our concerns, both financial and environmental, are intensified by the ongoing lack of sharing crucial information with the public. This absence of transparency leaves dents in our ability to fully understand the implications of this project, evaluate its risks, and assess its alignment with the long-term sustainability of our community.

Not transmitting available necessary information to the community, is a critical flaw that puts the entire project's viability into question. Without complete and accessible information, informed decisions cannot be made –not by rate payers and not by council. To address this gap, it is my understanding that some residents have resorted to filing Freedom of Information requests. This step has been deemed necessary to begin unraveling the many questions that loom over the servicing of 125 Peel Street South and to ensure that every stakeholder has access to the facts needed to engage meaningfully. This is crucial dialogue.

Financial Impact Concerns for Servicing 125 Peel Street South

We've recently learned that the Grey County Council announced a 128-bed long-term care home costing \$91 million with services in place. Considering that the Campus of Care is projected to have more than five times the number of beds, simple math raises the prospect of this project costing at least half a billion dollars. What exactly will this massive financial undertaking mean for the ratepayers of TBM, especially when the projected costs to provide 160 beds of for-profit care remain unclear? Are we ensuring the community benefits proportionately, or are we disproportionately favoring the developer?

In 2022, the town allocated \$11.5 million to service this project at 125 Peel Street South. With discussions now turning to using development charges for the reconstruction of Peel Street South, one must ask: Have we already exhausted the initial \$11.5 million without substantial progress? Furthermore, why are ratepayers being burdened with the costs of servicing this project, unlike the precedent set during the original Lora Bay development 20 years ago, where the developers covered their own servicing costs?

Our community in Thornbury West is particularly concerned about the disruptions and the financial burdens of introducing sewer and water infrastructure. The perceived benefits are not uniform; while some may gain, others stand to lose. There will be no advantage for those rate payers.

Compounding our concerns, the promptness to extend sewer and water services to this area was never part of the original town plans. It only emerged after an MZO expedited the Campus of Care proposal. Back in 2018, the focus was supposed to be on redeveloping the old Foodland property and updating the official plan—goals that were never realized. Instead, we are now facing a colossal project without an updated official plan or a detailed secondary plan for Thornbury West.

Given the substantial changes proposed with servicing 125 Peel Street South, including the reconstruction of roads and the introduction of active transportation routes, how does this align with the long-term needs and values of our community? Is there a clear, demonstrated need for such extensive infrastructure upgrades at this time?

This abrupt shift in focus without a solid, transparent planning foundation is alarming. How can we proceed with such a significant project without thorough financial and infrastructural planning that aligns with the long-term needs and values of our community?

As stakeholders in this community, we demand clear, detailed financial disclosures and a strategic reassessment of the project to ensure it aligns with the broader interests of all residents of The Blue Mountains.

Environmental Impact Concerns for Servicing 125 Peel Street South

The proposed development on 125 Peel Street South raises significant human health and environmental concerns that need careful consideration and rigorous study.

It is well established that development of former orchard lands in Canada and the USA has serious risks. Lead Arsenate and other chemical applications used historically in orchards including 125 Peel St South, can persist in soil for centuries resulting in human health risks, and risk of harm to eco- systems from the contaminated soils, the contaminated dusts carried off site as the soil is disturbed, and from toxic leachate into water courses.

A tributary of the Little Beaver River passes directly through the site roughly west to east. The Little Beaver is a cold-water trout stream that recently was rehabilitated

thorough the efforts of the Beaver River Watershed Trust and supported by the town. The installed fish ladder gives fish a way around the old dam. After a century of a dam barring access to spawning areas, the Little Beaver is again a viable cold-water trout stream and spawning ground.

Ensuring the protection of this ecosystem is essential and raises concerns about the current level of contamination in this Tributary of the Little Beaver and how planned constructions, like the bridge replacement, could further affect it.

The conceptual development plans lack detail on how stormwater will be managed and directed into the Little Beaver River without harming the local ecosystem. The potential for significant and deleterious contaminants to affect the broader Beaver River Watershed is another significant risk.

The town's water intake plant is less than a kilometer from 125 Peel St South. No one has forgotten the Walkerton tragedy. Anything that threatens water quality is not acceptable. Is mercury a contaminant on the old orchard lands? This project's potential to impact our water quality and public health could have irreversible consequences. It's imperative that we pause and reassess our approach to safeguard the well-being of our community and prevent possible future calamities. What is the state-of-the-art remediation of contaminated old orchard lands? Are there any that are truly effective?

Residents have not been provided access to crucial reports such as the preliminary Phase One and Phase Two Environmental Site Assessments (ESA) and the Natural Hazard and Environmental Impact Statement. The Phase One ESA by Cambium identified ten areas of potential environmental concern (APECs), necessitating a Phase Two ESA, which involves more intrusive investigations including drilling and groundwater monitoring scheduled to commence shortly.

The community's need for transparency and the opportunity to review these findings before proceeding with development is critical to ensure that all potential environmental impacts are fully understood and addressed.

How the project proceeded under a Community Infrastructure and Housing Accelerator (CIHA) raises questions about the application of provincial environmental laws and regulations. The engagement process must reflect a commitment to uphold these standards and involve the community in every step to align with the values of sustainable and responsible development.

QUESTIONS FOR COUNCIL:

Can the council clarify whether the current ratepayers' fees will increase as a result of this project?

Given the substantial projected costs and the unclear benefits to ratepayers, can the council provide a definitive cost-benefit analysis publicly?

In the absence of a drainage report, and Grey Sauble Conservation Authority's input, how will stormwater management be handled to ensure that it does not exacerbate contamination in the Little Beaver River?

When can residents expect to review Phase One and Phase Two Environmental Site Assessments and the Natural Hazard and Environmental Impact Statement?

With such a high risk of environmental damage, is Council confident moving forward without comprehensive and publicly accessible environmental assessments?

REQUEST OF COUNCIL:

This lack of crucial information significantly undermines the community's ability to participate meaningfully in decision-making processes. Our right to thoroughly understand the potential impacts of this development is not only a demand for transparency, but a fundamental aspect of responsible governance.

Therefore, I urge the Council to immediately halt all actions on this servicing project until there is an unequivocal assurance that a detailed, financial public review process is conducted and all environmental laws will be fully complied with. This pause is essential to ensure that the project proceeds responsibly and transparently, with the community's safety and best interests at heart