

Members of Council,

I'm here to raise a few concerns regarding the planning process in the Town of Cobourg – particularly with regards to the New Amherst rezoning application for the development of a new school.

My first concern is that Council is not aware of its newfound planning authority. Now that the OMB has been replaced with a less-powerful board, Council has the final say on all planning decisions.

The body replacing the OMB, the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal – or LPAT – cannot make planning decisions or overturn your decision. All it can do is refer the matter back to Council, if necessary, for further consideration. It is my understanding that this is a *radical* change in the planning process, and it places a huge responsibility on Council. And yet last week, three members of Council chose to support the rezoning in New Amherst, saying they are afraid of losing an appeal by the developer. That is no longer a valid reason to support a controversial rezoning application. Allowing a new school to be built in an existing community is a big decision, and I can understand the temptation to automatically defer to staff recommendations. However, staff are limited in the scope of their assessment, and that brings me to my second concern...

My second concern is that alternatives are not properly considered during rezoning applications.

Staff can only consider the application submitted by the proponent, and cannot examine alternatives – unless instructed to do so by Council.

The Planning Department's criteria for recommending a rezoning is based on what is *permissible* – what land use is permitted based on their interpretation of policy guidelines. But because the Planning Department can only consider the site-specific application, their recommendation does not weigh-up alternatives, and therefore does not necessarily reflect what is *best* – what is the best course of action, or in this case, the *best* site for a new school in Cobourg. Only consideration of alternatives – by Council's instruction – or a comprehensive zoning review like the one due to take place this summer, would be able to identify the *best* location for a new school.

My final concern is that Cobourg's Official Plan has not been updated and made available to the public.

It is my understanding that under the new LPAT system, this document has taken on added significance, since it would be the primary point of reference during an appeal. At present, the Cobourg Official Plan is not accessible on the Town's website, and it has been under revision for nearly a year. So I am respectfully asking Council to ensure that the Official Plan is updated, approved by Council, and posted on the Town's website as soon as possible.

The public should also be encouraged to actively participate in the revision of this document, since it will be the cornerstone for guiding the evolution of our community. Local citizens, Town staff and Council members would also benefit from a public information session, so we can all understand the new LPAT appeal system and its impact on the local planning process.

To summarize my requests to Council:

I am asking Council to consider whether the New Amherst site is the *best* location for a new school in Cobourg.

If you feel that it is, having considered all the alternatives, then by all means support it – but please do so based on the merits of the application, and not out of fear of an appeal mechanism which cannot overturn your decision.

Finally, please provide an update on the revision of the Cobourg Official Plan, and consider arranging an information session to bring everyone up-to-speed on the impact of the new LPAT appeal process.

Thank you for your consideration, and I would be happy to answer any questions.