

Presentation to Carlington Community Association

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My goals:

- show why a climate-positive Official Plan is important to communities.
- show what community associations can do to press the City to go further and faster on climate measures in the Official Plan.

But first a few comments on the climate crisis. The latest data from the Climate Atlas of Canada indicates that over the coming decades, Ottawa will experience considerably wetter springs and winters, much warmer winters, and a significant increase in very hot days (over 30°C).

These changes are expected to:

- increase the number and severity of flooding events;
- increase exposure to and impacts from heat island effects, especially for the poor, elderly and infants.
- increase the risk of forest fires in the near North, due to more intense and prolonged dry periods in between wet periods.

That doesn't sound too bad, and if Ottawa was a separate planet of its own we might do alright. However, climate scientists tell us that the world is currently on track to experience 3 to 5 Celsius degrees warming. Five-degree warming would be catastrophic, likely fatal to civilized existence. Even a “modest” 3 degrees implies disaster — enough to inundate coastlines, empty megacities, destroy economies and destabilize geopolitics.

A 4 C warmer world map suggests that as much as half the planet would become uninhabitable.

Climate is only part of the picture, of course. We have also already lost about 50% of the world's known plant and animal biodiversity. A set of numbers I find particularly shocking is that 96 of all mammal biomass is made up of humans and human livestock. Chickens alone make up more than 75% of all bird biomass on the planet. Basically, human activity has thrown the natural world into a situation of dramatic imbalance.

So what does this tell us about municipal politics? First, that it is entirely appropriate that the City of Ottawa not only declare a climate emergency, but also that it do something about it urgently. The Official Plan, which governs land use in Ottawa, is the place to start.

Dianne Saxe, the former Environment Commissioner for the Province of Ontario, has described land use decisions as Ontario's oil sands. "Our decisions on land use", she argues, "are the largest driver of our emissions and they lock us into, if they are done badly, a high fossil fuel future we are not going to be able to survive".

For this reason, the political choices about land use and supporting infrastructure embodied in the new Official Plan are the most important decisions that residents and Council can make to do our part on the regional, national and global stage, and help protect ourselves from the worst effects of climate and ecosystem breakdown.

So what can citizens and community associations do?

Very soon City Officials will be making two critical public policy decisions we need to influence. On March 30 a Special Joint Meeting of Planning Committee and Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee will consider and vote on a staff report outlining recommendations for Ottawa's "land budget". All indications are that City staff are going to recommend expansion of the urban boundary by at least an additional 1200 hectares, adding significantly to Ottawa's urban sprawl and the public cost of urban expansion. We urgently need to change that policy recommendation and influence the Council vote.

The reasons to hold the line on urban expansion are numerous, and touch on what people truly care about.

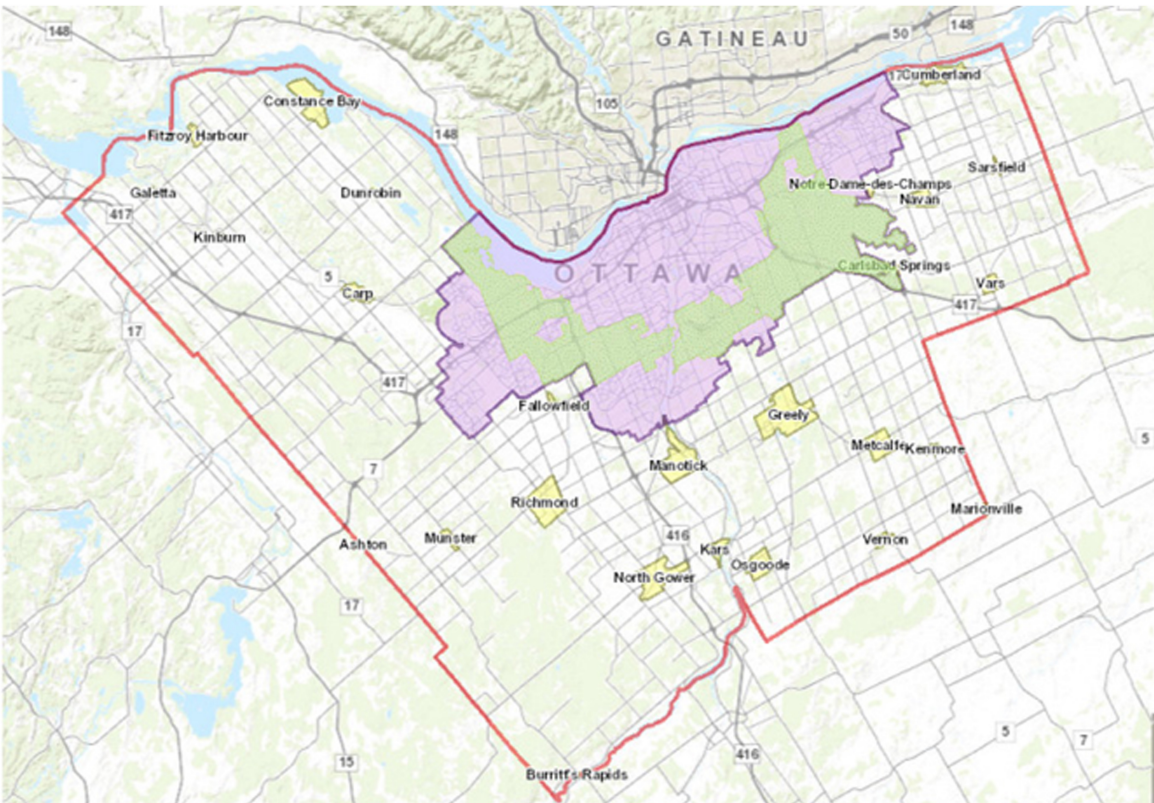
- We know that residents care about keeping municipal taxes down. Expanding the urban boundary would cost taxpayers for decades to come, for new roads, new water and waste water infrastructure and other municipal services. A 2009 City of Calgary report show that it costs about 30% more to provide city services to new neighbourhoods that are built on the edge of the city, compared to homes built within the existing city limits.
- The recent declaration of a Housing and Homelessness Emergency tells us that people (and Councillors) care about housing affordability and inclusion in Ottawa. New single family homes on the outskirts of Ottawa are less

affordable than homes in low-rise, multi-unit sustainable buildings that can be built or redeveloped in many neighbourhoods throughout the city.

- Village residents and others have also told us they care about protecting Ottawa's farmland and rural areas for future generations of young farmers. Ottawa could produce a lot more of its own food than we do currently, and these lands are vital to that future.
- Many people care about having a grocery store, a park and a library within walking distance from their home. Expansion of the urban boundary weakens efforts to create denser, inclusive, healthy neighbourhoods with nearby services (the so-called 15 minute neighbourhood). Villages want these kinds of neighbourhoods too, and are often opposed to village sprawl (another line we need to hold).
- Holding the Line(s) also matters because it supports action on the climate emergency too. Urban sprawl would increase carbon emissions and human stress through thousands of additional kilometers driven by new residents dispersed in the farthest reaches of the urban area, when we should be reducing GHG emissions from transportation. Furthermore, it would undermine the City's Climate Change Master Plan by locking in a carbon emission future much higher than it needs to be.

Because all these things matter to people, individuals, community associations and Councillors should be demanding now that staff bring forward to Council a policy decision that welcomes new residents and accommodates them inside the current urban boundary. There is room, especially if the priority for new housing and intensification is placed on low-rise, ground oriented, multi-unit homes with access to greenspace and other amenities.

Map Legend: Purple shows the current urban boundary. Green shows the Greenbelt. Red shows the outer limit of the municipality, which is 70% rural.



Finally, a second critical moment coming up and opportunity for community associations is the tabling of the Draft Official Plan by City Staff in October of this year. By then, all of the key policies of the Official Plan will be outlined. Our job for the next few weeks and months should be to hold City Officials' feet to the fire on the twin emergencies declared by Council (climate and housing/homelessness) and work with them to get the right policies in place, before big mistakes are baked in.

This Saturday there is a workshop to strategize and organize the actions and campaigns needed to influence the shape of the Official Plan and Council decisions in the short and medium term. To contribute, consider three things immediately.

1. Sign the petition to Hold the Line on urban expansion, a collation sponsored petition hosted on the [Ecology Ottawa website](#).
2. Inform yourself more on practical climate solutions for Ottawa, by visiting the website [ottawacimatesolutions.net](#)
3. Work as an association to engage with your Councillor, and other Councillors, to make it clear that the Official Plan is the place to set policies that truly

respond to the twin emergencies of climate and housing and homelessness. This starts with holding the line on urban expansion, and fostering just, healthy and sustainable neighbourhoods. The Official Plan is the most significant policy tool available to residents and to Council for shaping our collective response. Let's make sure we do it well.