Kevin C. Christenson, City Clerk

July 21, 2009

77 James Street North, Suite 220
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, L8R 2K3

To the Mayor and Members of Council
City of Hamilton

Dear Mayor Eisenberger & Members of City Council

We are corresponding with you again to express our concern regarding the continuation of the detailed Phase 2 studies of the proposed Airport Employment Growth District (the “aerotropolis”) without agreement of the province and completion of the employment land budget. We are also disturbed by the continuing lack of transparency and by an unfounded accusation leveled against HPD by a city official.

In November of 2007, HPD opposed the commencement of secondary planning for the AEGD on the basis that the City had not yet reached an agreement with the appropriate provincial ministries with respect to the “Land Budget”. It remains our position that the City has not yet demonstrated a need to expand the Hamilton urban boundary into prime agricultural lands to accommodate industrial growth, has not taken reasonable account of the existing stock of employment lands including opportunities provided by brownfield properties and has not prepared intensification strategies to accommodate employment growth within existing built up areas.

We are now a full twenty months into the detailed planning process for the AEGD at great expense to the taxpayers of the City of Hamilton and the City has still not reached an understanding with the province over the Land Budget for a new industrial park which may not be necessary or justifiable under provincial legislation!

We have repeatedly requested further information from City staff concerning the status of the City’s negotiations with the province, including our letter to council of December 8, 2008. We understand that letter was referred to the Economic Development and Planning Committee but it was simply received and we have never received a response.

At the April 28th CLC meeting we learned that the City would be meeting with provincial representatives to discuss the land budget during the week of May 11, 2009. As a party to the OMB appeal and a member of the Community Liaison Committee, formed as a result of an OMB order, HPD requested information from Mr. Guy Paparella as to the outcome of that meeting. This request was by way of an email to Mr. Paparella dated May 21, 2009. In his one-line response, Mr. Paparella stated: “The meeting was cancelled by the Province due to your request to attend.”
We believe this statement was in reference to a letter sent by HPD on May 6th to the offices of the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing and the Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure. We informed Mr. Paparella of our intent to contact the Ministries and in that letter we had requested that HPD be permitted to attend the meeting or to participate in a separate meeting of all parties to allow open discussion, transparency and disclosure.

We have now received written confirmation from both ministries stating clearly that neither ministry cancelled the meeting and in any event would not have done so because of our request to attend. Further, the meeting was initiated by the City and the decision to allow or disallow additional parties to attend the meeting rested with the City not provincial officials. We have attempted to obtain clarification from Mr. Paparella regarding his comment but he has steadfastly maintained that the cancellation was the result of HPD's request to participate in the meeting and made no attempt to retract his allegation or provide clarity.

Whatever circumstances led to the cancellation of the meeting, evidence shows that it was not because of the actions of HPD. Mr Paparella’s accusation is disrespectful, damaging to the function of the CLC, suggests that he and perhaps the municipality he represents does not respect individuals or organizations who question the wisdom of the aerotropolis, the associated sacrifice of agricultural lands, the related expenditure of taxpayer dollars and finally, the wisdom of continuing secondary planning for a proposed industrial park when the need and magnitude have yet to be determined.

Unfortunately, Mr. Paparella’s approach continues a pattern of behaviour by the City of Hamilton to be less than transparent with HPD and the public at large about the land budget discussions. The effect of the failure to be open about the uncertainties associated with the land budget is to leave local residents in the dark and to encourage more land speculation.

We are disappointed with the lack of transparency and less than professional behavior of city officials and again urge council to suspend the Phase II detailed secondary plan studies of the proposed AEGD until the land budget issue is settled. This is clearly an inappropriate planning process and unwise expenditure of tax dollars that is generating uncertainty among landowners, and mistrust in the general public. We respectfully await your reply.

Sincerely,

Michael Desnoyers
Co-Chair
Hamiltonians for Progressive Development

cc. Hon. Jim Watson, MMAH, Hon. George Smitherman, MEI, Victor Doyle, M.S.O., Tim McCabe, Chris Murray, CLC Members, Local Media