To: Hamilton City Council and the Mayor

From: Richard Reble

Date: Mon. Aug. 9, 2010

Dear Mayor Eisenberger and Councillors:

Recent news about the accelerating pace of climate change can longer be considered as just an interesting aside secondary to economic growth and politically sexy, capital investments (the Pan Am stadium included). I am referring here to the increasing number of climate change-related weather events Hamilton has experienced in the last two years.

In his latest book, Eaarth: Making a Life on a Tough New Planet (2010), Brian Mckibben, warns:

“Much more quickly than we would have guessed in the late 1980’s, global warming has dramatically altered...hydrological cycles. One of the key facts of the twenty-first century turns out to be that warm air holds more water vapour than cold: in arid areas this means increased evaporation and hence drought. And once that water is in the atmosphere, it will come down, which in moist areas like Vermont (where Mckibben lives) means increased deluge and flood. Total rainfall across our continent is up 7%, and that huge change is accelerating. Worse more of it comes in downpours. Not gentle rain but damaging gully-washers: across the planet, flood damage is increasing by 5% per year. Data show dramatic increases---20% or more---in the most extreme weather events across the eastern United Sates, the kind of storms that drop many inches of rain in a single day. Vermont saw three flood emergencies in the 1960’s, two in the 1970’s, three in the 1980’s, ten in the 1990’s, and ten so far in the first decade of the new century.”

In Hamilton, particularly with respect to the Red Hill Valley Parkway, we are very aware of the damaging and costly impacts of storm damage. Storms will most certainly increase in terms of both frequency and severity. So will the damages they cause and so will the cost of repairing them. Furthermore, the expected depletion of oil and the energy which it provides, not to mention escalating energy costs, will likely hamper our ability to deal with storm-related damage.

Because infrastructure (roads, bridges, rail line, ports, sewer pipes, water treatment plants, etc.) is so much in the background of our thinking, we forget that it’s what defines us as an advanced economy. Over the years, we have let ours deteriorate in favour of capital budget projects that never bring the economic game that you, our political leaders, promise us. With stormy weather on the increase, how will we ever recover if we are sucker-punched by one storm after another? In 2005, Harvard’s Center for Health and the Global Environment wrote two likely outcomes of climate change-related weather. The gradual change scenario was the one we used to expect. The rapid and nasty scenario was the one that comes closest to what we are already experiencing. It predicts that as storms and other disruptions become more frequent, they “overwhelm the adaptive capacities of even developed nations; large areas and sectors become uninsurable; major investments collapse; and markets crash.”
I put it to you, as Hamilton’s leaders, that expanding our city infrastructure, whether we are talking about new roads, sewer extensions, Aerotropolis, a stadium, or other structures) is no longer economically feasible since new infrastructure will assuredly cost more to maintain than it will ever generate in revenue. We will not be able to recover “sunk” costs. Therefore I call upon you to cease all present and future plans for building new infrastructure in favour of repairing/reinforcing/upgrading our existing infrastructure while fossil fuel energy is still available and still affordably priced.

Yours respectfully,

Richard Reble

Richard Reble

cc: clerks