

City prepares to defend call on urban boundary

Council should study intensification before battle begins, Rick Chiarelli says

BY JOANNE CHIANELLO, OTTAWA CITIZEN JANUARY 14, 2011 [BE THE FIRST TO POST A COMMENT](#)

As the city's legal and planning departments gear up to defend council's decision on how much to expand the urban boundary — at a cost of \$400,000 to taxpayers — at least one councillor believes council should seize the opportunity to look at how "intensification is affecting neighbourhoods" before the city's legal battle begins next month.

"If you decide to limit the urban boundary dramatically, then that decision equals more apartment buildings in existing neighbourhoods," said College Councillor Rick Chiarelli, who this time last year tried to reopen the urban boundary debate, but withdrew his motion when it became apparent he did not have enough council support.

In 2009, council decided to expand the urban boundary by 230 hectares, while the development community argued for 2,500 to 3,000 hectares to be added to the city's official borders. Numerous developers have appealed the decision to the Ontario Municipal Board, resulting in the five-week hearing set to start Feb. 22.

On Friday, the city solicitor, Rick O'Connor, filed a report to council outlining some of the witness statements and the city's response. OMB rules call for this evidence to have been brought to council if it is to be considered at the appeal. The report is scheduled to be presented to council's planning committee on Jan. 25 and to full council the following day.

Chiarelli said Friday evening that he still needs to read the solicitor's report, but sees the upcoming discussions at council as a chance for his colleagues — especially the newly elected ones — to ask about the impact of the boundary on their communities.

"Most people are going to care about the urban boundary because of the effect it has on their community," said Chiarelli. "This additional vote lets us make a statement about how much intensification we're going to have, how many apartment buildings we're going to have in existing neighbourhoods."

Councillor Peter Hume, who is the chair of the planning committee and who fought for the 230 hectare extension of the boundary, said Chiarelli's "insidious" argument is merely playing on the fears of residents.

"I don't believe this is a debate on intensification," said Hume about the upcoming appeal. "It's a debate about how high you want your property taxes to go as we pay for more urban sprawl. It's about the value of your home — more sprawl leads to lower home values. And it has a direct impact on what key infrastructure projects the city is going to invest in. If you want money in public transit in urban and suburban neighbourhoods, then you've got to have intensification."

Both O'Connor and the city's external lawyer, **Bruce Engell of Weir Foulds**, wrote that they believe the city has a strong, winnable case before the OMB.

The situation is slightly confused by the fact that the city's planning staff originally recommended extending the urban boundary by 851 hectares, a fact that has led some to argue that the city's planning staff will have to testify against council's decision to expand it by only 230 hectares.

Hume said that is categorically untrue, and that the planning staff is in support of the decision. Furthermore, council's boundary expansion of 230 hectares has already been approved by the Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

© Copyright (c) The Ottawa Citizen