

Presentation by the Durand Neighbourhood Association
to City Council Budget Deliberation

Thursday, February 22, 2007. 7:00 pm

Good Evening, my name is Sonja Macdonald and I am the President of the Durand Neighbourhood Association, also known as the DNA. I want to thank you for this opportunity to speak as part of your 2007 Budget deliberations. Also, I would like to congratulate you, Mayor Eisenberger and all councilors upon your election and re-election to Council. We have great hopes for what all of you can achieve over the next four years and we look forward to working with all of you and staff on issues facing our city and our neighbourhood.

The Durand Neighbourhood is bounded by James St. to the East, the Escarpment to the South, Queen St. to the West, and Main St. to the North. There are close to 12,000 Hamiltonians living within these boundaries. Our neighbourhood is made up of a great diversity of residents, we are home to seniors, children and everyone in between; to families who have lived in Hamilton for decades; to those who have recently emigrated to our great city from other parts of Canada and from other countries around the world. Also, we are home to those from many different income levels who have chosen to live in apartments, in condominiums and in private homes.

The Durand Neighbourhood Association represents the interests of this diverse community, and, as our Vision states, our membership constitutes “an active, resident-based voice that successfully addresses priority issues affecting our neighbourhood to nurture a vibrant downtown community.”

Tonight, in the time I have available, I'd like to focus on 4 budget priorities, which we call the 4 Ps – Property Standards, Police, Parks and Progress. For each of the 4 P's, there is a common link and that is standards of service. I'd like to look at each one separately beginning with:

Property Standards

Durand has faced a variety of property standards issues, a recent example being the state of the vacant former Thistle Club property, where the current owner was remiss, following the demolition of the historic Thistle Club, in bringing the site up to a safe standard. I will not bore you with the details, for those interested; you need only ask Councillor Bratina who joined the DNA and our residents in registering our complaints with staff.

Our Recommendation: We would like to see Council's commitment to increasing the number of licensing and property standards enforcement officers to address these types of issues in a timely and effective manner.

Police

The DNA continues to foster a good relationship with our local police representatives. Yet, in our experience, a real problem has developed at the point where citizens interface with police in reporting crimes. We have heard from a number of residents that when they call to report incidents that their information is not recorded, nor are they provided information about police action or response. This is not acceptable to our residents, nor should it be acceptable to you. Our senior police representatives themselves have offered that this is not a problem caused by a of lack of funding, but rather caused by poor service and a lack of management of existing resources at the police call centre which receives these inbound calls from our residents.

Our Recommendation: In view of the requested increase to the HPS budget, we caution Council to be certain that existing service standards are fulfilled and are more stringently applied before additional funding is approved.

Parks

One of the first issues tackled by the Durand Neighbourhood Association, 35 years ago, was the creation of the Durand Park in our community. Since then, the Association has raised tens of thousands of dollars for park improvements, including playground equipment and the planting of additional trees. Our upcoming Grand Durand Garden Tour on June 16th is raising funds for replacing outdated park furniture. Along with the money we have raised, our members have trucked water to the park to water trees we paid the City to plant and to care for, also, our members have spent hours weeding the park beds and berms that the City committed to care for, along with other basic park maintenance. As I outlined earlier, we are a densely populated neighbourhood and we have only one public municipal park. We have raised funds and committed neighbourhood time to our park's upkeep because we know what a valuable civic space this is – for children, families, seniors, pet owners, apartment dwellers and local workers. Despite our commitment to this municipal space, we have not seen the equivalent commitment or investment from the City.

Our Recommendation: We want to ensure that as the City develops new green space on the periphery, that they do not overlook the much used urban green spaces in the core, and in this case the Durand Park specifically. We need the City to reinvest in our urban neighbourhood parks!

Progress

The DNA would like to commend Council on their commitment to the conversion of one-way streets to two-way. Durand has been the test ground for many of these conversions, including Hess, Caroline and James St. S. These have all resulted in a calming of traffic in residential areas, and an increase in pedestrian activity in the James business area. Also, we would like to voice our support for two recent considerations by Council, namely the actions designed to support pedestrians in our communities and the introduction of Bus Rapid Transit in key corridors in the City. These are two excellent options that the DNA believes will vastly improve the quality of life in our City and specifically in our neighbourhood.

Finally, with direct relevance to our neighbourhood, we want to commend Council for their commitment to the restoration of City Hall and their expressed interest in the adaptive reuse of St. Mark's to house City staff.

Conclusion

In closing, 2007 is a very important year for us at the Durand Neighbourhood Association, as it is our 35th Anniversary. I would like to invite all of you to join us this summer for our celebratory events, first on June 16th for the Grand Durand Garden Tour and then on July 7, which is the official celebration of our anniversary, at our Picnic in the Park (Durand Park that is).

Thank you again for providing me with this chance to speak on behalf of the Durand Neighbourhood Association and I wish Council all the best in your work over the next four years.