

Presentation to council by Ben Bennett for RSD March 13, 2006

Good evening

What a privilege it is to live in a place where so many people care enough about their city that even though a vital public meeting is scheduled, along with two others, during March break, they still pack the council chamber. It is heartening to see how much people value their community.

So I ask you to think very carefully before you destroy their community.

The presentations and the letters clearly show that Guelph citizens are NOT mindless shopaholics who are willing to sacrifice community, air quality and traffic safety on the altar of more consumer choice.

I have spoken to you in the past about the environmental impacts of this periphery power centre philosophy you have before you. Tonight I am going to try something different. Let's talk about legacy.

This is a long-term planning exercise so let's look ahead. If this were to go ahead and four huge shopping centres were developed on the four edges of the city, here's what I think we can expect to happen.

Let's start in the south end. With the new mega Zehrs newly built at Clair and Gordon, the Hartsland Zehrs has either closed or has been converted to a No Frills - in which case the Campus Estates No Frills on Harvard Road has closed.

One or both of those shopping centres, having lost their principal anchors, go into decline. No one wants to open a new store in a no-traffic zone and if they could afford the rents, they would go to Clair and Gordon where all four

corners are starting to look like Cambridge. There are lots of chains but very few independents. Independents can't afford the rents. Some of those former business owners are now managers at those chains.

Willow West Mall is also in decline. The Zellers has closed, and the supermarket is not expected to last much longer since the new mega Zehrs opened next to Wal-Mart. The mall's previous owners of course sold it before they built the power centre at Paisley and Imperial.

The east end mega Zehrs store has opened and Watson Road is looking a lot like Paisley and Imperial, which looks a lot like Clair and Gordon, except the Zehrs is only 95,000 square feet. The former site of the Zellers and Zehrs stores on Eramosa Road has been converted into condominiums, but they're not selling very well. The shopping isn't very good there and the downtown is so run down no one goes there anymore.

At least you can find parking there now.

The Stone Road Mall was hoping the conversion of Zellers to Target would draw more customers to the area but it still struggles to find new tenants since the movie complex closed. Malls everywhere are hurting but they hold on because now that gas has reached \$2.00 a litre the power centres are starting to get nervous, too.

Meanwhile, the plaque outside that honoured this council for bringing consumer choice to the citizens of Guelph is quietly taken down by what remains of the city works department.

Is that the future you want to see in Guelph? Last month I invited the gentlemen from Loblaws to reassure us that Hartsland would not close if a mega Zehrs went into Clair and Gordon. He didn't. He can't.

The proof is all around you. How many Zehrs stores were there in Guelph when they were neighbourhood-sized stores?

How many are there now?

Wellington and Gordon – gone.

Victoria and Grange – gone.

Victoria and Woodlawn – gone.

Woolwich and Woodlawn – gone.

You can hide behind the old “well, that’s corporate decision” excuse all you want, but every time you increase the store size, and the shopping centre size, you reduce our shopping choice.