Thank -you for the opportunity to speak this evening. My name is Sean McCammon. I work for the Waterloo Region District School Board at the Laurel Creek Nature Centre in Waterloo. I have worked at Laurel Creek for 18 years, teaching students about the importance of forests and water and wildlife.

Many of our programs at Laurel Creek take students into an old growth forest at the north end of the property. This forest is bordered to the north by Environmental Sensitive Policy Area 80. Within the ESPA there is a field that has been farmed over the years. Because the field is surrounded by forest, it is often referred to as the “hole-in-the-donut.”

In 2004, I was walking with a class through the forest, and I noticed that our neighbour who owns the “hole-in-the-donut” had buried a wetland on his property. It was a low area that had cattails and frogs, and it had been bulldozed. I called the GRCA who sent out someone to look at it. The GRCA staff said that it was possible for the GRCA to make the landowner repair the damage, but would not pursue restoration at the time.

On October 19th, 2005, the same landowner started cutting down trees along a farm lane that provided access to the field. A Region of Waterloo by-law officer came out and put a stop-work order on the logging. The next day, Region of Waterloo staff came out to see the damage, and more trees had been cut, and all of the stumps had been dug up and buried in the forest. The trees that were cut were part of the Environmentally Sensitive Policy Area. The landowner made a road 115 feet wide through a protected forest, and now he is growing corn on it.

The developer says that nothing illegal ever happened here, and it is true, he was never charged with anything. But let’s be clear - no one from the region ever issued anyone a permit to create a 115-foot wide corridor through an environmentally sensitive forest. As a slap on the wrist, in 2005, the region banned the landowner from cutting trees on his property for one year.

It is very discouraging for citizens concerned about the environment, that environmental protections are not upheld by our municipal organizations. Someone can bury wetlands and make their own roads through protected forests, and no one does anything. There are no repercussions. And now, because the landowner has removed all of the environmental impediments to development, we are now considering building condominiums in the middle of a protected forest. And the landowner is arguing that the corridor into the field should no longer be considered part of the sensitive forest, because there are no longer any trees on it.

There are many environmental impacts that this development would have. There would be run-off into the creeks, there would be impacts on wildlife, we would see the spread of invasive species, loss of biodiversity, and on and on. But really, if the environment actually plays a role in decision-making, this picture is all that you need. It shows an environmentally sensitive forest with its heart cut out, and we need to decide whether the hole should have trees in it or condos. That’s the decision.

When the Beaver Creek Meadows District Plan was passed by city council in January of 2016, this is what it said could happen in the field:

“land use could include: Residential uses, and/or Open Space, and/or a Restoration area.”

The Beaver Creek Meadows District plan was not an approval of development. There were three options to be considered. The Environmental Impact Statement paid for by the developer only considered one of those options, and of course, recommended development. A consulting company hired by the city in 2015, recommended rehabilitating the field.

The City of Waterloo has an Environment-First policy which aims to enhance natural areas and increase canopy cover. Here is a goal in the City of Waterloo Strategic Plan:

“We are all stewards of our environment. Acting now by preserving the natural environment, reducing our carbon footprint and building the city in an environmentally sound manner, will benefit future generations.”

Sounds good!

There is an amazing opportunity here to create interior forest, where natural systems can keep functioning the way we need them to. We don’t have many areas like this in Waterloo. If the hole were filled in with trees, the entire forest would be as big as Stamm Woodlot. It would be twice as big as the forest in Bechtel Park.

All along in this process, I never actually believed that we would get to this point. I thought, even though the landowner had gotten away with some egregious environmental actions, all of the decision-makers were aware of this, and they surely would not let someone profit from these acts. I always felt that somewhere in the process, someone from the region or the GRCA or the city would stand up and say, “This is not an environmentally appropriate area to develop. Let’s put this issue to rest, and deal with other aspects of the Beaver Creek Meadows plan.”

But that hasn’t happened yet. Everyone defers to someone else in another organization. Or they point to the Environmental Impact Statement, or the Places to Grow Act, or the North Waterloo Scoped Sub Watershed Study. However, none of those documents restricts planting trees in the field.

It’s true that the field was designated as “residential” 25 years ago, however having an area designated as residential does not mean you cannot rehabilitate it. You can still plant trees there.

Everyone involved in this process knows this map. They can picture the field. They know what the “hole-in-the-donut” is. What is being considered is a straightforward decision. It’s an easy decision. Should a field - surrounded by an environmentally sensitive forest, bordered by Laurel Creek and Beaver Creek, beside a conservation area where students go to learn about nature – should that field have condominiums in it or trees?

If the decision to be made here reflected the will of the citizens of Waterloo, we would be planting trees in the field, instead of considering building a gated community for perhaps only 100 people.

I know the process is skewed in favour of the developers, and everyone feels like the deck is stacked. But I’ll tell you what I know.

I would like to see trees in that field.

My family wants trees.

The students of Waterloo want trees.

The teachers in Waterloo want trees.

The people in Laurelwood want trees.

The people in Northlake Woods want trees.

The people in Conservation Meadows want trees.

And a couple of developers want condos.

The vision for development in Waterloo should reflect the values of the citizens of Waterloo. Everyone would prefer to see trees growing in that forest. Let’s find a way to make it happen.

Thank-you very much.





