

Not a giant step for bungled Wilmot Land Grab:

Only 20% of eligible voters in Kitchener-Conestoga voted for Mike Harris Jr.

Luisa D'Amato's superficial analysis of the election results does not mean the proposed Wilmot land assembly moves forward. D'Amato gave two reasons – an election victory she defined as 'decisive' and new information that the land assembly may be for Toyota. She overlooks the strength of community opposition, the lack of proper planning, the significant site challenges, and the economic uncertainty that surrounds such a project proceeding.

Let's deal first with the vote for Mike Harris Jr. A majority of voters supported the three other candidates who oppose the Wilmot Land Assembly. Some people who voted for Mike Harris Jr. told WilmotCAN that while they oppose Mike Harris Jr.'s support for the land assembly, they voted for him for other reasons including tariff concerns and international trade. D'Amato herself says that Harris' vote result 'was not huge'. The result for Harris Jr. was not a majority of the votes cast and the election was not a referendum on the proposed land assembly.

D'Amato says "this land is being assembled specifically for Toyota Motor Manufacturing in case it needs a site for battery assembly or other processes." The key words here are 'in case'. The potential of trade tariffs, the lack of water supply for battery processes, and the fact that the site only meets 7 of 44 criteria for an industrial mega-site are just some of the factors that create great uncertainty about the future of a massive project in this distant location.

No one wants to stand in the way of bringing good jobs or keeping a strong community partner like Toyota in Waterloo Region; Toyota has given generously to the United Way Waterloo Region Communities as one example. When they built in Woodstock, they worked extensively with the community, creating a very unique and innovative agreement with the Indigenous community as well. The lack of transparency in this Wilmot land assembly fiasco is not indicative of behaviour we've seen from Toyota in this community or Woodstock and could damage their good reputation if forced on an unwilling host. It's unlikely Toyota wants a site that wouldn't fit their high site selection standards and world-class criteria.

There are other important factors that D'Amato doesn't include in her article, including this site being contrary to all previous planning, concerns about massive negative agricultural impacts, the tremendous lack of required infrastructure, the threats to our adjacent water aquifers, and the deep opposition by Wilmot and Waterloo Region residents to the project. A poll conducted by Pallas Data showed only 12% of citizens felt the government had adequately consulted with citizens.

There have been considerable concerns raised about the lack of even a single public meeting, so many secret backroom meetings, and developers once again knowing details months ahead of the public just like the Greenbelt scandal still being investigated by the RCMP. If the Wilmot site is approved it could damage the political legacy of every

politician who supported it – particularly given such widespread public concern on so many issues.

The site certainly is not “shovel-ready” given the lack of necessary water, sewage, and proper transportation infrastructure in a watershed that is already nearing capacity limits. And given so many economic uncertainties – particularly tariff threats, curtailed EV investments, pending municipal elections and possibly even another round of provincial and American elections before this project may be decided.

Finally, it is important also to note that Mike Harris Jr. said himself at the New Hamburg Board of Trade All-Candidates Forum on February 24th that he does not support land expropriation from the farmers. If finding a site for a company like Toyota is to proceed in Waterloo Region, the proposed expropriation of 770 acres in Wilmot Township should be cancelled. Mike Harris Jr. should live up to his public statement opposing the expropriation and undertake a proper, transparent planning process congruent with our Official Plans, sustainability goals, and farmland protections to determine the ideal location.

We already have a good relationship with Toyota in Waterloo Region and further expansion would be welcome. But only on a site that meets good planning criteria, public transparency, and environmental and financial objectives. It's time to cancel the proposed expropriation of the 770 acres in Wilmot and start over. That is the only way a proposal such as a Toyota Assembly Plant will ever be able to move forward and succeed, ensuring that our essential food and agriculture industries, our long-term sustainability goals, and our urban and rural communities continue to thrive.

Signed,
John Jordan, Wilmot Civic Action Network (WilmotCAN).

The Wilmot Civic Action Network (WilmotCAN) – www.wilmotcan.com – unites community groups and neighbours to advocate for transparency, accountability and fiscal responsibility from elected municipal and provincial leaders, representing the thousands of citizens whose voices have been ignored. We are dedicated to restoring transparency, accountability and good governance, fostering collaboration, and promoting a sustainable future for all. Our goal is to build a strong, engaged community that holds its leaders accountable for protecting our essential farmland, surface water and groundwater, which are crucial for water supply, food supply, and a healthy thriving community.