**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Citizen’s Groups oppose MZOs**

**Urge Wilmot Council to Impose Moratorium on MZOs.**

Get Concerned Stratford, Blair Engaged, Citizens for Safe Groundwater, the Grand River Environmental Network, and the Water Watchers jointly announce their opposition today to the proposed Cachet Developments MZO request in Wilmot Township. The five citizen’s groups jointly call on Wilmot Township and all Region of Waterloo Municipal Councils to develop substantive, mandatory policies to address MZO requests. Such policies must include legitimate public engagement and put a moratorium on consideration of any MZO requests until after all Official Plans and Municipal Comprehensive Review processes are completed later in 2022.

The Cachet Developments MZO request was posted to the Wilmot Township on Christmas Eve with completely inadequate information available to the public over Christmas. The MZO request was originally on Wilmot's January 4th Special Council Meeting agenda. However, more than a dozen delegations from community, environmental, and agricultural groups, along with a record number of people attending the hastily convened Special Council meeting spoke in opposition to the MZO and convinced Wilmot Councillors to defer any MZO decision until February 28th so that questions can be submitted to the developer with the expectation that more can be learned about this proposal for an entirely new village of thousands of residents between the communities of New Hamburg and Baden. A classic example of leapfrog development and a new precedent for Waterloo Region.

While this MZO and leapfrog development being demanded by Cachet could have many troubling repercussions for Wilmot Township and the surrounding community, it is the Region of Waterloo and neighbouring municipalities that will be most impacted. The developer admitted to Wilmot Council that it’s motivation to seek the MZO was to bypass the upper-tier government and the Regional Official Plan Review to avoid all proper, proven and required planning processes that co-ordinate growth and infrastructure as well as protect existing land owners and tenants.

The use of MZOs in the three communities of Stratford, Cambridge, and Wilmot include similar abuses of power by their respective Municipal Councils. In each community developers worked for months in secret to craft their MZO request and in both Stratford and Cambridge the mayor, Councillors and Staff were complicit in keeping this from the public and catering to the developers profit motive. The fact that Wilmot’s MZO was to be announced and approved so rapidly over the holidays with little public knowledge or information is equally troubling.

The common thread in each of these communities is that the staff and council chose to prioritize the developers’ interest and work with the developer to subvert the legitimate interests of existing citizens.

Kevin Thomason, Vice-Chair of the Grand River Environmental Network, an alliance of citizens and environmental groups from across the Grand River watershed states, “It is not too late for Wilmot Township to send a strong message to developers by rejecting this MZO and its blatant attempt to bypass proper planning processes as well as the Regional of Waterloo Official Plan. The avalanche of competing MZO’s this will set off across the region and province will be devastating as every developer seeks also to avoid the Official Plan Reviews currently underway and get the development they desire regardless of the impact on the existing community.”

"MZOs are unprincipled to the pillars of strategic planning, environmental oversight, local decision making, and required community engagement” said Rory Farnan of Citizens for Safe Groundwater. “We support an MZO moratorium until such time that a comprehensive review of their intended use is undertaken for future applications."

Tim Armstrong from Blair Engaged comments “We have found the majority of citizens in our community strongly agreed that the government of Ontario and Cambridge Council needs to revoke the MZO issued secretly and hastily with no public consultation or any of the proper studies.  The abuse of power by using these legal directives in ways they were never intended to be used by the Ford government in support of a highly profitable US Corporation hiding behind an NDA has to stop.”

In Stratford, Melissa Verspeeten from Get Concerned Stratford expressed relief that they were ultimately successful in getting the company behind their MZO to suspend its plans, “Stratford residents had to form grassroots groups and fight for months to try to get even the most basic answers to environmental concerns and questions raised by the community. It was our citizens standing up for our community, democracy and the future health of our planet that finally ended the MZO.”

Mike Balkwill Campaign Director at Water Watchers says that “it has been appalling to see so many MZO’s issued across Ontario – dozens in the past year alone. These are not in the best public interest, usually don’t benefit citizens, and too often place developer profits along with haste as the paramount priorities. They are not going to lead to the best planning outcomes or the future communities we need.”

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