

## **SAMSUNG SOLAR FARM PROPOSAL - MOUNTSBERG**

*Comments to the Planning and Development Committee - Tuesday, July 7, 2015  
Arend Kersten, Executive Director - Flamborough Chamber of Commerce*

Good morning. Thank you for the opportunity to address you for a few minutes on the proposal by Samsung to develop a very large 'solar farm' in the Mountsberg area of Flamborough.

The FCC met with two representatives from Samsung who asked that the Flamborough Chamber of Commerce (FCC) add its support to the proposal. For the record - and in the interests of full disclosure - I need to confirm that Samsung is not a member of the FCC.

We learned much about the proposed development during our meeting. We understand that the Samsung proposal is in response to a provincial 'Request For Proposals' (RFP) designed to provide 'alternative' or 'green' energy proposals. As we understand it, the competitive RFP bidding process places a high value on community engagement and municipal endorsement.

Subsequent to the Samsung meeting, the FCC consulted extensively with both Councillor Judi Partridge and Councillor Robert Pasuta as well as a number of community champions - including Graham Flint of FORCE (Friends of Rural Communities and the Environment). Armed with that input, the Samsung request (for endorsement) was considered by the FCC Board of Directors (BOD). What follows are some observations and conclusions:

1. For obvious reasons, the FCC enthusiastically endorses the concept of the development of more 'alternative' or 'green' energy sources. While the business model may be open to debate, the provincial government is to be commended for the initiative.
2. The FCC lacks the technical expertise to evaluate the 'nuts and bolts' of the application. We will have to leave that up to - and trust the conclusions of - the many regulatory agencies that will be involved in the evaluation and potential approval process.
3. It is our understanding that the proposal is for a solar farm only. Specifically, it excludes windmills and/or biomass. If the Samsung proposal were to include windmill power, the FCC BOD might have reached a different conclusion.
4. During our conversations with Samsung, two priority sites were identified in the large 'study area' as defined by the proponent. We note with interest that the proposal before you is for a single defined site located on the south-west quadrant of Centre Road and Mountsberg Road in north Flamborough.

5. The FCC feels very strongly that the Samsung proposal should not be allowed on any productive agricultural land - regardless of the 'class.' (Councillor Pasuta has assured us that significant production can take place even on agricultural lands that is not rated Class 1 or Class 2.) Samsung told us that the two identified priority sites are not productive agricultural lands. But therein lies a problem. A visual site inspection from the road appears to indicate that the identified site (2037 Centre Road) is indeed in current agricultural production. And there is an OFA (Ontario Federation of Agriculture) sign in front of the house located on the site. Furthermore, a review of Google maps seems to confirm the agricultural use on the property.

6. The Samsung proposal is for 20 years on leased property. I don't know about you but I don't expect to be around 20 years from now. If in 20 years, the contract with Samsung is not renewed, we have questions about what will happen to the property. All a huge multi-national corporation like Samsung has to do is establish a separate corporate entity ... and dissolve it when the contract is expired. What does that potentially mean regarding the costs related to the removal of the solar panels and the remediation/rehabilitation of the property? Perhaps the city should require an irrevocable 'Letter of Credit' to fund the anticipated remediation/rehabilitation costs.

7. Perhaps the Finance Department can confirm the figures but a review of the 2015 tax table for Flamborough indicate that the rate for 'farm' land is 0.225974 percent while the rate for 'large industrial (new construction)' is 4.780851 percent. If we are correct, then the property taxes on a Samsung solar farm site in Flamborough will increase some 20 fold. And that is not taking into account how much the value of the land will increase. If a Samsung proposal goes ahead, the value of the property will go through the roof. Translation? More property taxes. Much more.

8. It appears that the Planning Committee and Council will need the 'wisdom of Solomon' in choosing between a very significant 'green' energy project on the one hand and protecting productive agricultural land on the other. Perhaps there are other sites within the defined study area that will not require the use of productive farmland.

Based on the above, the FCC BOD - after thorough discussion and careful reflection - is prepared to add its '*endorsement in principle*' of a Samsung solar farm proposal in north Flamborough **PROVIDED** is does not use productive agricultural land **AND** does not include windmills.

There are a couple of other thoughts we want to share with you.

1. We are concerned about the process.

We understand that the province - and not the proponent and/or the Planning Department - has set a deadline of September for submissions of application. As Hamilton's Planning Committee,

you are being asked today - July 7, 2015 - for your endorsement. **BUT** the first public information session is not scheduled until tonight.

With the greatest of respect, we suggest to you that this process is backwards.

The FCC is a passionate champion of public process and engagement as well as political transparency and accountability. Some gray-haired Flamborough old-timers like me remember the Spider. And we remember the lessons from that fiasco. Let me quickly remind you of what happened.

A car racing enthusiastic from Burlington had a dream. But his dream turned into a nightmare for many Flamborough residents. And especially the former Flamborough municipal Council.

The proponent had a dream to build to build an Indianapolis-type race track on the north-west quadrant of Highways #5 and # 6 at Clappison's Corners that would include hosting Formula1 and NASCAR events. As is his right, the proponent personally met privately with every member of Flamborough Council seeking local political support for the project.

At a subsequent special meeting, Flamborough Council - in less than one hour - provided unanimous 'in principle' support for the race track project. As the then-editor of the *Flamborough Review*, I attended almost every meeting of Flamborough Council and its committees for about a decade. I can tell you from personal observation and experience that Flamborough Council rarely agreed on any issue - let alone unanimously. One of the few exceptions was the Spider.

When news of the Spider 'hit the streets,' the community went absolutely apoplectic. Heaven and earth together couldn't contain the anger.

Eventually, the Spider spun its way out of Flamborough. But let's not forget the lessons from that sad episode.

We know that Hamilton Council and committees are now in their summer meeting schedule, meaning fewer regular meetings. We also know that any decision made today must be ratified by the entire Council ... which is scheduled to meet next this coming Friday, July 10.

Perhaps there is some merit to 'tabling' the matter before you today until Friday, so that you will have the benefit of the public input when you consider making a final decision.

2. Finally, let me share for a moment our 3-point 'broken record refrain' regarding Hamilton.

(a) Like many, the FCC believes Hamilton is on the cusp of something very special. But we are concerned about Hamilton's fiscal challenges - especially its debt burden. While the

municipal debt appears to be manageable, it will require careful oversight and prudent leadership from Council.

(b) It is our firmly-held belief that the residential taxpayer is 'maxed out.' Since the creation of the 'new' Hamilton 'supercity' many residential property owners - especially in the 'outlying areas' - have seen their taxes double and more. And many will argue that during the corresponding period, municipal services have been seriously eroded.

(c) The FCC is convinced that a large part of ensuring Hamilton's long-term fiscal sustainability is *more commercial and industrial development*. We quote from a recent article in the *Hamilton Spectator* related to an interview with Jason Thorne, Hamilton's General Manager of Planning and Economic Development.

"(Jason Thorne's) department is also adding two new business facilitators, one each for rural and small business applicants. They are meant to shepherd applicants through city hall's systems.

"All of it matters to taxpayers because only about 13 per cent of Hamilton's tax base is in non-residential segments. Neighbouring municipalities come in between 15 to 18 per cent, said Thorne. The goal is to grow the commercial-industrial share by 1 per cent. To put that in perspective, that's the equivalent of *28 Canada Bread plants*" (emphasis added).

Also on the agenda today is the proposed Rural Zoning Bylaw. The FCC is very concerned about some aspects of these new rules - especially as it relates to existing commercial and industrial enterprises in rural Flamborough and Ancaster. Dozens and dozens of small, family-owned enterprises face an uncertain future because of the new Rural Zoning Bylaw.

I don't want to believe for a second that any member of Council wants their political legacy to include a reference that they were instrumental in 'running businesses out of town' into the willing arms of more business-friendly neighbouring (and competing) jurisdictions.

The Samsung solar farm proposal may be part of the answer when it comes to '28 Canada Bread plants.' It is our hope that the dozens and dozens of existing businesses in rural Flamborough and Ancaster whose futures are threatened by the Rural Zoning Bylaw will receive the same level of support and enthusiasm as that provided to Samsung.

Thank you for your time. I'll be glad to try and answer any questions you may have.