

Hamilton chose courage

Rejecting an outright ban on AI data centres, council opted for deliberation over fear

LOUIS FRAPPORTI

For many years, I have worked closely with the City of Hamilton and civic leaders to promote our community as a place to invest, innovate and build. Through Gowling WLG's global network, and in collaboration with leaders across business, government, education and health care, I have supported efforts to attract attention to Hamilton's economic opportunities and remarkable research strengths.

That experience explains why I shared the concern expressed by many in Hamilton's business community about the proposed interim control bylaw on data centres. Had it passed, Hamilton would have become the first city in Canada to impose such a sweeping prohibition on this category of investment.

The reputational consequences would have extended well beyond any single project. At a time when cities everywhere are competing for investment, talent and the infrastructure required for advanced research, Hamilton risked sending precisely the wrong message.

Our objective should be to accelerate — not inhibit — the research that can save and improve lives.

This was undeniably a controversial issue. Those who raised concerns about energy and water consumption, environmental effects, transparency and community benefit were well intentioned. But in listening to the opposing delegates and reading the many protest signs, it is obvious that the issue also became a magnet for broader anxieties having little to do with the planning merits of any particular project: distrust of artificial intelligence and large technology companies; fear of job displacement; concerns about privacy and surveillance; skepticism toward institutional expertise; growing hostility toward capitalism, economic growth and the so-called "investment class"; and a belief that major investments inevitably benefit corporations and elites at the expense of ordinary people.

These concerns should not simply be mocked or dismissed. Technological and economic change can produce disruption, inequality and legitimate uncertainty. But neither should these wider ideological grievances be permitted to determine land-use policy or foreclose investment before particular proposals have been fairly examined.

What occurred in Hamilton was, in some respects, a local manifestation of a growing reactionary movement across many Western democracies — one that increasingly treats technology, innovation, institutional expertise and private investment as presumptively harmful. It is a movement often more comfortable preventing change than shaping it, and more inclined to prohibit investment than establish the conditions under which it can responsibly proceed.

Good public policy requires more. It requires elected representatives to weigh competing evidence, consider long-term consequences and resist the politically easier course when it is not in the community's best interests.

That is why Hamilton city council's decision not to enact the bylaw was so encouraging.

Mayor Andrea Horwath deserves credit for ensuring councillors heard directly from experts. McMaster University and its leaders deserve recognition for explaining what advanced computing infrastructure means for research, commercialization and Hamilton's ability to attract exceptional talent. The many business leaders who spoke up demonstrated why their voices must also be part of civic debates.

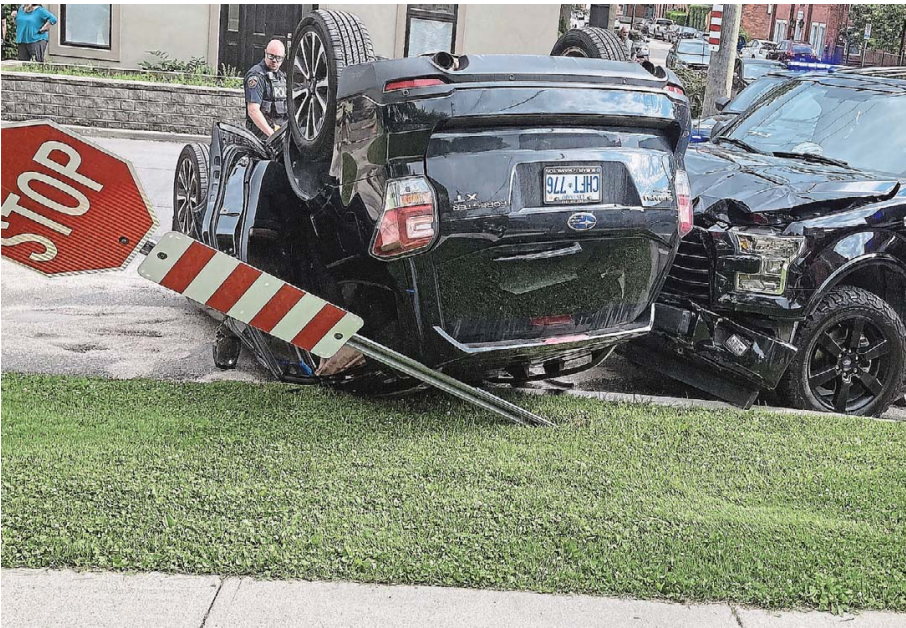
Most importantly, a strong majority of council resisted the easy political temptation to bow to intense and organized opposition. Reconsidering a position after hearing additional evidence is not weakness. It is leadership.

The decision is not a blank cheque. Proponents must now proceed carefully, transparently and collaboratively. They must listen, pursue high environmental standards and demonstrate tangible community benefits.

There is much work ahead. But on this day, thoughtful deliberation and political courage prevailed.

That was the right decision — and an encouraging day for Hamilton.

LOUIS FRAPPORTI IS A HAMILTON LAWYER, ADVISOR TO THE HAMILTON URBAN PRECINCT ENTERTAINMENT GROUP AND HOST OF THE CABLE 14 SHOW "MAVERICKS."



THOMAS FROESE

Commenting on the advent of modern seatbelts, Thomas Froese notes, "These days in my neighbourhood we're simply navigating a new four-way stop where, after crawling up to it, nobody knows what to do. This, after a car flipped rather remarkably onto its roof there some time ago."

Strap in and thank your lucky stars for Nils Bohlin



THOMAS FROESE
OPINION

Friday, July 17, was Nils Bohlin's birthday. More on Mr. Bohlin shortly. His claim to fame involves seatbelts.

Seatbelts weren't always in fashion. Consider the 1970s. There's my father and his mutton chops with my buddy Paul and myself, all in our blue van during a snowy night on a country road with black ice.

Before we hit the ditch, Paul screamed an expletive, which is always cool for a young teenager — except in those moments when you're facing death.

I had neither seatbelt nor seat. Instead I sat low, in back, on a heater, a metal box connected to a thick heating hose, everything sitting loose on the van's floor behind its two seats.

After hitting the ditch, the van did its best impression of a Snowbird jet and rolled 360 degrees, fully around and back onto its wheels. From its front doors we then jumped, myself last, having farthest to go to escape the crumpled vehicle, its engine, dangerously, still running.

While the van rolled I'd felt suspended in air, as if unseen angels had things under control.

Surprisingly, I felt little. It wasn't unlike when some neighbourhood punks beat me horribly and I walked away simply with a better understanding of how fear and adrenalin

work together.

Bohlin, an aircraft designer, would have thoughts about this rollover phenomena. The thoughts of Paul's parents were simply that he'd never drive with us again.

This may be because during the mishap, Dad Froese was sporting a leg cast. When a police officer came by our house — we'd hitchhiked home — he had questions, all answered by my father while he hid his left leg under a home office desk.

This isn't to indict my father, although, cast aside, he was charged with leaving an accident scene, which, remember, was a dark, frozen field.

It is to say that despite life's topsyturviness, things usually somehow work out.

Paul became a police officer. We were groomsmen in each other's weddings. And I had a good story when the need arose.

Children of the '70s bounced around in plenty of cars. My sister and I first did so in my father's purple Pontiac Parisienne, a boat of a car where children who were very small and tired could nap atop the rear window's parcel shelf. Later, our red Cutlass convertible had seatbelts at least in front.

If the old milk truck we took to our farm had one, I don't recall it.

But now consider airplanes. How about that unnamed Serbian on a recent Ryanair flight, Greece to Germany? When outside debris shattered his passenger window, only his head and shoulders were partially sucked out of the plane.

His seatbelt saved his life.

In this we're products of our time. Horses got people around for thousands of years with their particular horse hazards. These days in my neighbourhood, we're simply navigating a new four-way stop where, after crawling up to it, nobody knows what to do.

This, after a car flipped rather remarkably onto its roof there some time ago.

So we can all thank our lucky stars for Bohlin, who'd have turned 106 yesterday. The engineer from the modest Swedish city of Härnösand didn't just design aircraft, but in 1959 he designed the modern three-point seatbelt.

Who knows how many lives it has saved?

Not that everyone buckles up. Driving in developing nations, that is the majority of the world, can be especially harsh. So there are stories and images, most unpleasant, from there too.

And while only about five per cent of drivers in Canada now don't strap in — they're often drunk — a full one-third of all road deaths in this country result from no belt. Oh, to be a human missile.

It's good news, then, that over time we've learned something. Even so, years down the road people will still look back in complete shock because of God knows what else that we're now doing.

THOMAS FROESE WRITES ABOUT NEWS, TRAVEL AND LIFE. FIND HIM AT THOMASFROESE.COM AND THOMASFROESE.SUBSTACK.COM.

Council's retreat on data centres betrays Hamilton

MATTHEW GIBSON

On Wednesday, the City of Hamilton was bathed in an orange haze reminiscent of the dystopian future of "Blade Runner."

Forest fires burning 1,500 kilometres north of the city have dispersed smoke across southern Ontario, the inevitable and entirely predictable result of ever-worsening climate change.

That same day, our own city council failed to protect this city and its environment from the newest contenders in the race to destroy our planet: data centres.

Those that have been following the fight over proposed AI data centres in Hamilton will know that, until this week, it seemed that a one-year moratorium was a sure thing, waiting only to be ratified at Wednesday's session.

Instead, the bylaw, which was limited to a one-year moratorium, was shamefully voted down 10-6. While the details of this disappointing reversal will be well-documented in this paper and others, as a lawyer and business owner in the city, I was particularly struck by two of the excuses given by those who vot-

ed it down: investment and enforcement.

Firstly, the concern that the bylaw wouldn't stand up to legal challenges. Coun. Tammy Hwang (Ward 4), among others, stated that they received information from the city's legal department indicating that the bylaw might be outside of the city's authority, and could lead to legal challenges and lawsuits. What they failed to explain, possibly because they don't understand, is that this is exactly how the legal system is designed to work: a government body passes a law, that law is challenged by groups that oppose it and the judiciary determines — through a studied contemplation of the relevant facts, legislation and case history — whether the law holds up.

If, as a city council, you never test the bounds of your power, you never had any power to begin with. And if you, as a councillor, back down from what you believe is best for your constituents due to fear of a fight, you aren't cut out for the job you were elected to do.

Secondly, the investment-deterrence excuse. Mayor Andrea Horwath and several others claimed that any ban or moratorium would

deter corporate investment in the city, as if money were the overriding factor to be considered in any council decision. Looking at Hamilton's industrial history, it is clear that prioritizing investment over public welfare has failed our populace for decades. The industrial sector is a blight on our waterfront, spewing toxic fumes and raining mysterious black soot on residents for miles around. Acres of prime lakefront property sit unused and unusable as industry has fled for cheaper markets, leaving toxic waste sites, and yet our elected officials can't seem to make the connection to this new wave of profit-over-people infrastructure they so desperately want to protect.

Wednesday's vote was a disappointing — but sadly not surprising — reversal of what seemed to be a Hamilton city council that was listening to what Hamilton wants.

Perhaps this October's election will be the true referendum on how the citizens feel about data centres — and the officials that failed to listen.

MATTHEW GIBSON IS A REAL-ESTATE LAWYER WHO LIVES, WORKS AND BIKES IN HAMILTON.