

## **WITNESS STATEMENT OF REV. WILLIAM CHAPMAN**

I have been a member of the Pastoral Team of First Baptist Church Guelph for almost eleven years. Prior to that I was Principal of the Baptist Leadership Education Centre, our denominational bible college, in Whitby Ontario for twelve years, and pastored in Hamilton, Philadelphia and Thunder Bay. Before entering the Ministry I worked as a planner for the Department of Highways, (now the Ministry of Transportation and Communications), in the Head office in Downsview. My University studies included Urban Studies(Honours BA) at McMaster, Education (Bachelor of Education) at Thunder Bay, Ministry (Masters of Divinity) in Philadelphia and the sociology of ministry (Doctor of Ministry- the study of Interpersonal space and boundaries) at McMaster University.

I was born and raised in Guelph and after being away for twenty five years, I returned at the call of First Baptist to do ministry in their midst. Since returning to Guelph I have had the privilege of serving the City of Guelph on the "Smart Guelph" task force and have been actively involved in Committees associated with the Upper Grand District Board of Education, Teen Housing Committee and other community based social service initiatives. As well I am currently the Chair of the Inter faith Committee for Spiritual and Religious Care at the Guelph General Hospital and an occasional lecturer at McMaster University Divinity College and Waterloo Lutheran Seminary.

For decades, members of Baptist Churches have been known as "people of the book", we are a Christian church that attempts to define itself, it's faith and practices , through reflection, interpretation, and life application of the Bible. The concern I have for the properties at the junction of

Hwy's Six and Seven, (the two cemeteries and the Jesuit Centre) comes from my view and application of scripture.

The first issue the re-zoning raises for me is the issue of balance. Where is their evidence of a concern for the balance of land set aside for sacred and secular?

Consider three Biblical case studies.

The Old Testament book of Exodus records the story of Moses' encounter with God. In the third chapter Moses is guided into the wilderness on "the far side of the desert " where he came upon a "bush on fire" that did not burn up. As he approached the bush the voice of the Lord came to him and said "Do not come any closer, take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is Holy ground". (NIV Ex 3:2,5) For Moses to encounter God, he had to be removed from the commercial pressures of his family, leave the busyness of his life and enter into the solitude, silence and isolation of the land to hear the voice of God.

The second is also from the Old Testament from the book of Ezekiel. In the 45th chapter and in the 48th chapter the Lord reveals to Ezekiel the assignment of lands for the sanctuary where He will meet with His people. The sanctuary is to be in the centre of an area 25,000 cubits by 10,000 cubits (12x5 km) to allow a buffer between the lands of the people set aside for commerce and housing because these are seen by God as a distraction for worship and a distraction from a true relationship with Him. This is the vision of what God wants from and for His nation. This is the ideal of God and

the desire of His heart. This is what God asks the nation of Israel to create and protect. If God is indeed the same “yesterday, today and tomorrow”, would He change the desire of His heart for worship and spiritual growth, and ask his nation to not protect their sacred space?

The third biblical case study comes from the New Testament Gospel of Matthew chapter 19. In this story Jesus encounters a rich young man and asks him to follow the Lord's leading. The young man replies that he has done everything required by faith since birth and Jesus responds by saying “go sell your possessions, give to the poor and come and follow me.” The implication, and Jesus' later clarification, being that “things” get in the way of true faith and that it is hard for the rich person to enter the kingdom of God.

When I put these three biblical case studies together what they say to me is that for me to develop my faith, for me to express my walk with God I need places and opportunities to leave the world of commerce, distance myself physically and emotionally from “things”, and focus on the presence of the Spirit of God. When a high intensity commercial centre is juxtaposed next to a place of worship the psychological, spiritual and emotional impact is tangible. What I experience when this happens is a sense of idolatry, that somehow as I am surrounded by purveyors of “things” and am caught into the “busyness”, I am worshipping the god of this age. Where is the sensitivity to a balance between the two? Is the juxtaposition of two such radically divergent land uses such that we would automatically reject such a scenario? Then why a high intensity retail complex next to retreat lands and cemeteries?

I realize that where the two church and commerce, have been historically enmeshed there is little that can be done, but where we have the opportunity to preserve and protect spiritual oasis for the practice of faith, I believe we need to set boundaries and maintain a balance between the sacred and the secular spaces we preserve. In our process of determining co-existing land use, where is there a determination of appropriateness based on social, cultural, historical and religious values and land uses?

For this reason, I am opposed to the recent re-zoning of the lands at the junction of Hwy 6/7. Although the previous industrial zoning was less than ideal it did not promise to generate the traffic, busyness and sense of commercial "values" and "secularization" that a high density commercial centre will bring.

The second biblical issue that arises for me is the issue of Stewardship.

Again, consider the biblical insights. The steward was not the owner of the land. The steward was responsible for land management and ensuring that the land was used as the master willed it. The Christian church, as a whole, has come under considerable attack, justifiably, over the past twenty years because we had not developed a theology of stewardship and instead had simply "bought into" a theology of land, air and water usage that reflected the consumerism of our culture. As a consequence we have the ecological nightmare that we face in western culture. As we speak to redress this issue we find ourselves confronting those same land use practices and practitioners we had at one point supported and are seen as betraying our roots. Nevertheless the transition from unqualified support to

thoughtful redress must occur. Is high intensity, retail/commercial zoning the best for this sight? Previous Councils and land management and planning officials thought not and zoned it for industrial applications. High intensity commercial/retail usage was deemed best located elsewhere.

As I reflect on the stewardship of land I am concerned that the City has not evaluated the site in light of "wisest use." There is no argument with a company(ies) having land to earn a living, pay staff, and make a profit, but is this the wisest place to do these things? In terms of stewardship of place, values, belief and spiritual practice could not the other value based land uses be placed elsewhere? Are there not better places to build a 155,000 sq.ft. retail structure than next to two cemeteries, and a retreat centre, where the traffic and noise volumes are already difficult to work with and where the additional traffic and noise will simply compound the problems?

I realize that these two concerns raise subjective, interpretive concerns for which there is little or no objective measure possible. Yet is it not this very subjective and non-measurable reality that defines faith and spirituality and is it not these very values we are attempting to preserve?