

HAMILTON CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Presentation to City of Hamilton Committee of the Whole Maple Leaf Investment Opportunity

November 7, 2005

This is an extremely critical issue for the City of Hamilton. We are now at a tipping point in the future of our community with respect to economic development and sustainability. We have seen the loss of over 3,000 jobs over the last six years, and hear almost monthly of new closures. One of the most frightening aspects of the reversal of fortunes we have seen in Hamilton no doubt is the uncertainty over the Stelco situation. It is of no comfort to us here that this is a trend being experienced throughout North America, and is something over which we may have little control. As a result, leaders in our community have been working hard to reverse this trend. We are losing too much of our labour force, particularly our young people, and our residential tax base is bearing too much of the burden. I don't think there is anybody in this community who wouldn't agree that this trend is simply unacceptable and unsustainable.

We now find ourselves with a window of opportunity. We have been identified as a growth centre by the Province of Ontario. In addition, we are now experiencing new investors looking at the Hamilton area for the first time. We do not have a lot of time or necessarily a lot of options. We are not in a position of being able to choose from a broad menu of economic development options.

Does this mean we take anything that comes our way? Of course not. Every development opportunity must be assessed properly. My understanding is all that is being asked today is simply to have an opportunity to fully assess the development proposal being made by Male Leaf. That assessment, however, requires us to be objective and separate fact from rhetoric. From work both the Chamber and the Real Estate Board have undertaken, the facts are clear. A small minority of our community is opposed to this development, while almost half of the population supports the development. Even the areas in the vicinity of the proposed new plant are split evenly

between those who support it and those who do not.

The Real Estate Board reviewed statistics around the existing Maple Leaf plant in Burlington, and found that house prices on the average increased as much or more than house prices elsewhere in the City of Burlington. Clearly, the Maple Leaf presence did not result in any dramatic difference in house prices for that community. Similarly, there is no reason to believe that, with a plant that would incorporate more advanced technology, there would be any difference here in Hamilton.

Having dealt with the facts of the case, there is an element of perception that is important to this discussion. Perhaps the most important impact of Council's decision will be on the future economic opportunities we may or may not see in our community. I want to put an end to the debate today. Clearly, if this project is not approved, it will have a devastating, long lasting impact on the investment community.

We are now beginning to make some progress, due in large part to the vision of the leadership of this Council in making very positive and pro-active decisions about a number of the building blocks of our community, including the Red Hill Creek Expressway, development at the harbour and around the airport, the re-emergence of a strong downtown, and the development of Brownfield opportunities. We need to move ahead and continue with this positive but tenuous momentum. Any backsliding at this stage would only undermine much of the progress we have made in all of these areas, and would certainly make it difficult to attract new business ventures and encourage those who are currently looking at Hamilton as a place for new investment.

At few other times in the history of our City has there been a greater need for dedicated leadership. Sometimes that requires making tough decisions, and occasionally it means making decisions which are not popular.

However, if popularity is an issue, it is important to remember that every time someone steps forward to express a concern in opposition to the proposal, there are at least three times the number of people who support this initiative.

There are clearly those who have some concerns with this proposal - not surprisingly, those who live in the immediate area. While their needs are real and must be

addressed, this is not a neighbourhood issue. What is needed from Council is a decision that is best for the community, not only now, but for the future.

While much of the loss of jobs in our community is beyond the control of this Council, this application is an opportunity where Council indeed does have control and can make a decision in the best interests of the community.

Each of you has been given a position of authority and responsibility. Now is the time to use that position wisely, keeping in mind where we need to be as a healthy sustainable community. We have to keep in mind that the approval of the Maple Leaf development simply allows us to stand still in that it only replaces the jobs that have been lost over the last year.

In summary, we congratulate Council on their boldness in some ground-breaking decisions and commitments they have made to put our community on the right path. Let's not lose sight of what is required to get us past the tipping point so that the momentum we are achieving is an upward spiral, as opposed to a downward, spiral. At the same time, we would urge Council to do everything it can to work with Maple Leap and the neighbours to ensure this project results in the best possible fit, and that the interests of those in the immediate neighbourhood are fully protected.

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