



Loreena McKennitt - Rally #3 Remarks  
December 7, 2020  
Market Square, Stratford, Ontario

## **Stitching up democracy from the inside out**

Good afternoon everyone and thank you once again for coming out on a cold wintery day, close to Christmas and during a pandemic. I can't tell you how much your support means to all of us and each other.

Firstly, a bit of house keeping. *Get Concerned Stratford* is taking a bit of a pause from launching a rally today and so we at *Wise Communities* have taken up the banner, so to speak. We believe it is so necessary to show our support to each other by being here, and of course, to show our elected officials we're as passionately concerned about this project as ever.

I want to thank so many of you for reaching out to us with your thoughts, observations, ideas and concerns and we've tried to run with as many of these as best we could. As many of you already know, it is December 16th when council will be approaching the cost-sharing agreement and this is a significant deadline.

But before we go any further, I would like to invite Melissa Verspeeten, from *Get Concerned Stratford*, to bring us up to date on some of their achievements last week and what we can look forward to this coming week. Melissa?

[Melissa's remarks]

Thank you so much for that Melissa. I want to say what a great job you and your team are doing. It is really impressive and greatly inspiring.

I will apologize in advance since we were trying to bring some other speakers into today's rally but simply ran out of time, so you are stuck with me again.

Like last week, my remarks today will be posted on the *Wise Communities* website, should any of you be interested.

And if at the end of the rally you would like to linger for a while, we certainly encourage you to do that, so long as it's in a socially-distant way. In fact, any time you can be in this square or any public place bringing attention to this subject, connecting and educating people with the facts, this can only be a good thing.

For this is a tale of many questions.

### **Update on the Parlee-McKennitt letter and our response**

Last week you may recall it became clear that there were now two subjects of concern – the suitability of the proposed glass factory for the City of Stratford and secondly, the failure of the democratic process which should allow citizens their legal and democratic right to a robust examination of this complex and high-stakes project. The absence of such a process, rich in veracity, transparency and timeliness, has shocked many citizens and we continue to seek an explanation of how we got here. It comes down to trust.

Last week, many of you will also recall that I relayed to you that on November 26th former city solicitor Paul Parlee and I furnished the city with a letter of questions for which we were expecting a reply on Thursday Dec. 3. This is the first thing I will briefly report on today. Why is it brief you might ask? Well, that's because of the brief response we received, despite them having a week to prepare answers. Here is the response from Stratford's CAO Joan Thomson:

“Good afternoon Loreena McKennitt and Paul Parlee

Thank you for your letter of November 26, 2020.

Our practice has been to review and consolidate the questions submitted by citizens on this project, and post the responses on our website so that everyone has access to that information.

To remain consistent with that practice, we will add our response to your questions on our website at [www.stratford.ca/glass](http://www.stratford.ca/glass) as soon as possible.”

So unsatisfactory was this brief response, Mr. Parlee and I shot off our own response which also briefly reads:

*“Dear Ms. Thomson,*

*Thank you for your letter of December 4, albeit 21 hours after our requested deadline of December 3 at 4:00 PM.*

*While you have responded to our letter, you have utterly failed to answer any of our questions or provide a date by which you would do so.*

*Regrettably, this will be pointed out to the interested public on Monday who have been awaiting along with us for a reply.*

*We and many citizens will see this as yet another failure of the Mayor and council to truly protect the legal and democratic interests of its citizens and the principle of democracy.”*

### **Is this what democracy looks like?**

And post script: At 9:00 a.m. this morning we received the following dispatch from Ms. Thomson.

*“Good morning Ms. McKennitt and Mr. Parlee – thank you for your follow up email. The City will be posting responses to the questions you and others have submitted to the City, on our website later this afternoon.”*

And so we wait.

### **Chapter 2: The timeline, the provincial Conservatives & MZO's**

You may recall that last week I focused primarily on the actions of the mayor and city council in my remarks. Interestingly, over the course of this week I found myself experiencing the very thing I was suggesting to the councillors, that it is okay to allow your positions to evolve as you gather more information. Many would call it ‘keeping an open mind’. And so, my own mind has evolved as to who else has been involved in this civic catastrophe.

In order to understand this, one must not only follow the money, but follow the timeline which we have been assembling for the past two weeks, now posted on the *Wise Communities* website.

It begins with then-premier Kathleen Wynn's trip to China with delegations, including one from Stratford, during which she tweets on November 27, 2017:

*"I'm thrilled Xinyi Glass Holdings plans to develop its first North American manufacturing facility - a float glass plant - in Ontario. The partnership will create 400 jobs for Ontario workers."*

The timeline passes through 2019 when the ground work of studies is being conducted, including archeological and air quality reports, noise feasibility reports and so on. As a citizen not familiar with the preparations of a project of this scale and complexity, it is truly an informative exercise.

It also captures the three dates, from November 2018 to April of 2020 during which the mayor requests one of these highly controversial and some would say undemocratic instruments called an MZO – a Ministerial Zoning Order. This is an order the minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing can issue, which does not require public consultation and can only be revoked by the Minister since there is no appeal process.

A MZO is an instrument which was rarely used at the time of the mayor's initial request in 2018. Indeed, it had been rarely used for the previous 20 years, yet the current provincial government has issued over 35 MZOs this year alone. As of yesterday, this has led to the resignation of seven people, including head of the Greenbelt Council David Crombie.

This is the same David Crombie who was once mayor of the City of Toronto, the same David Crombie who was a former federal cabinet minister, a Conservative cabinet minister. Why would this instrument provoke such a dramatic response from such highly seasoned and respected individuals? Simply put, the MZOs are designed to bypass public consultation and with little hope of appeal. And the groundwork of this glass factory was also facilitated by this authoritarian instrument, the MZO.

But I digress. In this case, it would have been reckless for the mayor to proceed with a project of this nature without the full support of our MPP Randy Pettapiece when they first met to discuss it in the last half of 2018 with our MP John Nater.

And yet, the question arises: Why then did the minister turn down both the mayor's first and second request for an MZO? Did Mr. Pettapiece not have the backing of his minister by this time, after all this work was being done?

Even more bewildering is the question of “What changed the minister’s mind after the mayor sent his third appeal to the minister in April 2020?” Did Mr. Pettapiece intervene then? Or did Xinyi intervene, albeit without a registered lobbyist, since no one has been able to find evidence of one?

We know the minister said the following in a TVO Ontario interview on July 10th of this year and only 2 days after issuing the MZO for Stratford:

*“For now, we’re quite happy with the dozen or so (MZO’s) I’ve done....that have been driven by a council decision, in a public council meeting, before it comes to my desk. That makes sure the public is aware there is a request, it communicates there is a priority of a council, and then it’s up to us to decide whether we want to move forward.”*

Last week I was focused on what evidence the mayor of Stratford might have given the minister to substantiate public consultation, but I failed to ask the question this way: What evidence did the minister ask of the mayor to substantiate public consultation before he issued his MZO? Or did he just issue it anyway?

Perhaps his words of July 10 were but window dressing for the media and public consumption when in fact all parties knew that they could expedite the process and circumvent the public’s involvement by using one of these MZOs.

It must also be pointed out that at the time the mayor first requested an MZO in the fall of 2018, word had not yet gotten out about the ‘efficiency,’ shall we call it, of the MZOs since they were rarely given.

By 2019, the number of MZOs issued had risen to five. As of today, our provincial government has issued as many as 35 so far during 2020 – more in a single year than the past 20 years combined. The MZO is being weaponized against the environment in favour of development, as a Toronto Star article recently put it.

And the promotion of these MZOs are now being embedded into an environmental section of the province’s Bill 229, *Protect, Support and Recover from COVID-19*, which has now passed second reading with no hope of amendment.

Is this what your democracy looks like Mr. Pettapiece?

**Wednesday Dec. 2: Meeting with the mayor & Connecting with the former Chief of Chippewas on the Thames**

Wednesday found me in the mayor's office for a brief 20-minute exchange of thoughts. It was a good meeting, I am happy to relay. And I began by saying that, for me, this fight is not personal. It is the principle and the values which I am fiercely fighting for and frankly would die for – democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

Naturally, 20 minutes goes by quite quickly when there is so much to ask and so much to say, but one of the fruits of this visit alerted me to the fact, that indeed, neither he nor council were alone in the pursuit of this glass factory for the city.

The day of Wednesday was rounded out last week by my first conversation with the former Chief of the Chippewas of the Thames First Nations community. I shared with her that there were proposed plans for a glass plant on the perimeter of Stratford and given her community's long-standing interest in this land I wondered if they were aware of the proposed project. She was not, but said she would raise it with the current chief of Chippewas of the Thames, Ms. Jacqueline French, particularly because of the considerable matter involving the consumption of water associated with this proposed plant.

This issue of water was echoed when Mr. Parlee forwarded to me his own thoughts on water. These thoughts can also be found on our website:

*“Seems to me that a critical issue is water consumption and water availability. The City of Stratford draws water from an aquifer. The City has a permit to draw X number of gallons per day. Xinyi will draw approximately 1/3 of the amount of water drawn by the City of Stratford (and that's before they might expand).”*

*My questions are as follows:*

- 1. Has there ever been a survey of the quantity of water in the aquifer/ underground reservoir?*
- 2. Has there ever been a hydrological study done to determine the rate at which water is refreshed to the aquifer?*

*Now, people as old as I am recall that there was an unlimited amount of cod available to be fished by Canadians and the rest of the world without limit. And then there wasn't. The Canadian cod industry, fishing and processing communities upon which it relied, collapsed completely and there exists today, decades later and almost complete moratorium on cod fishing.*

*Without knowing the rate at which the City of Stratford is depleting the aquifer, the actual quantity of water in the aquifer and the rate of replacement, we run the risk of a similar catastrophe particularly if we are assisted in the depletion by Xinyi.”*

So that Wednesday, I went to bed exhausted, but feeling that real meaning was being achieved in this process of examination.

I think this is what democracy looks like.

### **Thursday: Dec 3 The Xinyi info session**

On Thursday, as many of us know, Xinyi's representatives GSP consultants out of Kitchener, headed by a Mr. Chris Pidgeon, held another information session which went on for nearly two-and-a-half hours and which included a question and answer section at the very end. This session covered subjects ranging from basic project information to environmental standards and requirements set out by the ministry.

You can imagine when some individuals went to refer to the video of this session they discovered, with some dismay, if not horror, that the question and answer section had been scrubbed out and there was no record of either the questions or the answers.

Of course, anyone alive who witnessed the 1989 Tiananmen Square protest, will see disturbing echoes of the Chinese government's efforts to scrub out that part of their history.

This is what it looks like when there is no democracy.

Which brings me back to Mr. Parlee's letter to council regarding the matter of China and which I think is worth repeating:

*"I wish to start out by saying that we ought not to conflate the population and people of China with the Government of China or the Chinese communist party (CCP) and Government policies.*

*What is the connection between the Chinese company Xinyi and the People's Republic of China Government and the CCP? The Chinese Government passed the National Intelligence Act which requires all Chinese organizations and companies to provide access, cooperation and support for Beijing's intelligence-gathering activities.*

*Moreover, the CCP has a Party committee which is involved in the management of China based and owned corporations with a view to ensuring that the activities of the corporation are consistent with and support the best interests of the Nation of China."*

Mr. Parlee goes on in his letter to state, *"The Chinese Government is engaged in a large-scale systemic oppression of millions of people, in particular the Uyghurs, Tibetans and ethnic Muslim populations.*

*The CCP has punished any opponents to its policies by hostage diplomacy, and has jailed for almost 2 years without any trial or hearing, (Canadians) Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor.*

*The House of Commons recently passed a motion requiring our Government to develop a plan to combat China's surveillance and intimidation of Chinese Canadians in Canada and their families in China.*

*The Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) warns that this Chinese state sponsored harassment in Canada in part, is part of a global campaign of intimidation and harassment which threatens Canada's sovereignty and the safety of Canadians."*

This is not a matter of racism, but one of national sovereignty, and I would urge everyone to read the letter in its entirety.

This is not what democracy looks like.

#### **Friday Dec 4: David Donnelly's letter, climate change & the environment**

On Friday, renowned environmental lawyer David Donnelly sent a very fine letter to the City, establishing important points and connecting the dots concerning the environment, the glass factory and climate change, and of course the Climate Change Emergency Declaration adopted by the City this spring.

Quite significantly, Mr. Donnelly confirms that:

*"It is our unequivocal opinion that Stratford Council has the complete authority without legal liability to deny Xinyi's proposal for a Cost Sharing Agreement. This fact is reflected in this statement on the Town's website, which states that if the City decides not to enter into the cost-sharing agreement, it is likely that the float glass manufacturing facility will not locate in the area."*

This is what democracy looks like.

Which brings me to last night's conversation with a city councillor who I have a lot of respect for and who has done some amazing work in this city. I asked her, "has there been enough due diligence with respect to the conditions of the workers in this plant, no matter where they come from, to ensure that they are safe and secure and not denied the civil liberties most Canadians enjoy in their workplaces? Knowing that the devil is in the detail, could she confirm that there is currently a level of detail available to ensure that safety standards would be at the highest level, along with civil liberties?"

This is what democracy looks like.

So where do we go from here? Well, we continue marching until the job is done. We sing from the mountain tops, from this town square, from the market and wherever we can share this incredible tale to all citizens, many of whom are only now awakening to this exceptionally complex and high-stakes project.

As we emphasized last week, we are not anti-industry. We know that a healthy and viable city depends on a spectrum of businesses and industries to provide employment and financial well-being. However, what we are saying is that these industries and businesses need to be complementary and aligned with a vision for the future – a future informed by our highest values and standards.

So I say to everyone here, contact your friends, contact your associates, contact anyone and everyone you know. If they have questions direct them to our website. If they agree with you, ask them to contact the mayor's office. Contact city council, phone them, e-mail them, let them know how you feel.

But be respectful and be helpful. When talking with councillors applaud them for having the strength and character to allow their opinions to evolve.

And most of all, don't let up. Don't stop. Victory is at our fingertips and this victory is not only for you and I, but most importantly it will be a victory for the citizens of Stratford. And yes, these actions and this movement are indeed what democracy looks like.

In closing, I want to again thank everyone for coming out each week. And if the council hasn't come to their senses on this by next Monday, I think you can safely say we will see you here one more time before that key December 16th vote.

I also acknowledge that I am only one of many who are fiercely leaning against this wheel. Together we can do this.

I want to assure you that this is a battle for many, many important things – the health and well-being of our land, our water, our air, and the legacy we leave our children, our neighbours' children, our grandchildren, and our First Nations people.

It is a battle for democracy itself, so that it is not allowed to rot from the inside out. And I finish with the mantra I left you with last week.

Canadians uphold the values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

Defending it begins at home.