

## Opinion

OBSERVER EDITORIAL

## Wilmot land grab indicative of policies of growth over people

**P**laying the FOMO card – fear of missing out – the president of the Waterloo Region Economic Development Corporation last week tried to justify the bid to seize Wilmot Township farmland for industrial uses.

Tony LaMantia, addressing the Confederation Club in Kitchener, said the region needs to assemble development land to attract investment. Failure to do so would mean the money will go elsewhere.

He also downplayed the impact of losing the farmland, noting it represents just 770 acres of some 214,000 acres of farmland in the region.

None of the arguments is likely to resonate with the public, however.

Despite the claims of those promoting wasteful economic development programs in the region, there's no need to push for growth here – in fact, just the opposite holds true.

Even leaving aside the unsustainable growth paradigm this land-grab proposal adheres to, we need to know if Waterloo Region really has a problem attracting new businesses. Yes, there are pre-existing challenges locally, provincially and nationwide, particularly when it comes to good manufacturing jobs, but how much is really needed while the region remains a growth centre?

Small communities with a small industrial/commercial base experiencing a net outflow of residents may need real programs to entice business and create jobs. That's certainly not the case in the region, though the types of new jobs here are not always ideal – the myth of the service economy endures nonetheless. While many of the service jobs are the low-paying and precarious kind – think of the retail and hospitality industries, among the hardest hit during the pandemic – there are urban jobs that lend themselves to remote work, a trend that greatly accelerated during the lockdowns.

Given the housing crisis and debilitating demand on resources caused by the current growth policies – immigration, in particular – it's clear that the problem with growth is too much rather than not enough. Who wants more of a bad thing?

What's become clear – though not to those making the decisions – is the hypocrisy of pushing economic development while giving lip service to social woes such as housing affordability and environmental degradation.

The former is simply an expensively wasteful make-work project for a few people, while immigration and settlement patterns work against issues such as affordable housing, community-building and the support of friends and family.

With economic development, growth in both housing and jobs will concentrate in a few spots in the province, regardless of window-dressing attempts by municipalities: those communities that don't need growth will get it, with all the incumbent social ills and rising costs to existing residents, and those areas that need it – i.e. almost every municipality outside of the Golden Horseshoe and Ottawa – won't get any.

For those communities experiencing growth, the benefits will be few, the problems many.

Locally, in Woolwich and the region, little of the growth has been a boon to citizens. Much of the finances from growth got sucked into the black hole of staff increases, higher wages and pet projects that provide zero benefit to the public, often doing harm instead. Rather than spreading the load and providing more funds for essentials such as infrastructure, growth has been putting ever-more stress on the current infrastructure while adding to the inventory that will one day require more government money to maintain and replace. And always at a cost greater than the purported benefits of growth.

The downsides of growth – a long list, not limited to the inarguable ecological damage – should be discussed openly given the perils.

It's down that path the conversation needs to go, despite the refusal of officials to face reality.

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## Verbatim

"Women working in front-facing jobs, like food services and accommodation, took the biggest hit. Restaurant workers and grocery store clerks, for instance, made less in 2023 than in 2019."

The pandemic wiped out 35 years of women's economic gains in two short months, and a significant number of women in the workforce today have not yet recovered, says Katherine Scott, a senior researcher with the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

## The Monitor

From April 2019 to the end of 2023, inflation-adjusted per-person GDP, a broad measure of living standards, declined from \$59,905 to \$58,111 or by 3%. This decline is exceeded only by the decline in 1989 to 1992 (-5.3%) and 2008 to 2009 (-5.2%).

Fraser Institute



ANALYSIS OF CURRENT WORLD EVENTS

## Small assassination attempt in Slovakia; not many hurt

**M**adeleine Albright, the former US Secretary of State, once called Slovakia "the black hole at the heart of Europe," which seems a harsh judgement on five million Slovaks. The assassination attempt on Prime Minister Robert Fico was alarming, but we can narrow the problem down to a more specific group of people.

Albright was really talking about the gang of ex-Communists in which Fico honed his political skills. Some were violent thugs from the start, and their tactics have enabled them to hold power in Slovakia for almost half the time since Communist rule was overthrown in 1989. But first, let's be clear on what this attempted assassination did not mean.

It does not herald a new era of political extremism in Europe. It stands on the lowest rung of the escalation ladder, in which some 'lone wolf' individual with obscure or unknown motives tries to kill a prominent political figure.

That always generates speculation about broader motives, like Slovak security expert Juraj Zabožník's remark that "when four or five shots are fired, someone is at fault. I



**GWYNNE DYER**  
Global Outlook  
on World Affairs

didn't see anyone jump in front of the prime minister" (to take a bullet or five for him).

Come on. Maybe Fico's bodyguards were distracted, or maybe they just didn't love him enough to die for him.

The second rung of the ladder is when governments arrange the killing of opponents at home or abroad. This is fairly common, and ranges from India ordering contract killings of Sikh nationalists in Canada to Israel killing Iranian generals with ballistic missiles in Iran's embassy in Syria. It is seen as very naughty, but not worth a war for.

The highest level is reached when governments arrange the murder of the heads of other governments. That is very rare, because the consequences can be unpredictable and extreme.

Serbian army officers set up the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the heir to the Austrian throne, and triggered the First World War. The murder of John F. Kennedy might have caused the Third World War if the CIA

had concluded that Lee Harvey Oswald, his assassin, had been acting on Moscow's orders. (He did spend time in the Soviet Union.)

However, the events in Slovakia last week will not cause a war. "We are on the doorstep of a civil war," warned Matúš Šutaj Eštok, the interior minister in Fico's government, stirring up panic while pretending to calm it, but Slovakia is nowhere near that.

Fico's Smer Party is the kind of nationalist-populist organization that is now commonplace in eastern Europe. It tries to shut down opposition media – "hyenas, idiots, and anti-Slovak prostitutes," in Fico's words – and it likes Putin's regime in Russia. It loathes Jews, Roma, gays, Ukrainians and the European Union (although it takes EU money).

In other words, Fico is the lost twin to Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. They are both cousins to Poland's Jarosław Kaczyński (except that his Law and Justice Party, being Polish, is deeply pro-Catholic and anti-Russian). And they all look hard-right, but it's more complicated than that.

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