

Why this 16-year-old is fighting for more tall buildings in Hamilton



Lachlan Holmes has started Hamilton Forward, which advocates for more high-rises



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Lachlan Holmes, 16, focuses much of his out-of-school time trying to convince adults to allow high-rise buildings in Hamilton. (Samantha Craggs/CBC)

It was last April when Lachlan Holmes sat in the city hall gallery and watched city councillors temporarily quash his dream.

Their subject was a hazy one to most 16-year-old boys — whether developers can build high-rises taller than the Niagara Escarpment. But not to Holmes. He was [already devoting](#) much of his out-of-school time to founding Hamilton Forward, a citizen group that encourages Hamilton to grow up, not out.

When councillors [voted down buildings over 30 stories](#) in Hamilton's downtown secondary plan, he wasn't discouraged. And he's not now.

By the time he's 30, "I'd hope that we have a signature building. I would hope that there is something Hamilton can look at, and be proud."

- [Hamilton approves new rule saying buildings can't be higher than the escarpment](#)

If Holmes has any say in it, that'll happen. [Hamilton Forward](#) had its first meeting in September, and he's been quietly gathering support ever since. Right now, the group has about 15 members.



Holmes is a supporter of Television City, which would be higher than the Niagara Escarpment.(Lamb Development Corp.)

Hamilton Forward's next public appearance, he said, will likely be when an attention-grabbing proposal like Brad Lamb's Television City arises. Television City, which is currently before the Ontario Municipal Board, is everything Holmes likes in a development. It has eye-catching architecture. It's in a location prime for density. And it has, Holmes said, the promise of being a signature building.

Tall buildings, Holmes said, hold a promising future. They're cheaper for taxpayers because they use existing infrastructure. They're eco-friendly since its residents live on transit lines.

- [3 new skyline-changing projects in the works, including a 'landmark' highrise](#)

Right now, Hamilton plans a massive urban boundary expansion in Elfrida, which is exactly the kind of development Holmes doesn't want.

"There's years of evidence that shows sprawl isn't good socially, environmentally, economically, from a health perspective," he said.

"It's time we focus more on creating an environment that allows us to grow upward, closer to existing amenities, on existing infrastructure."



Holmes says he wants better transit, more tall buildings and more people moving to the downtown core than to the outskirts. (Samantha Craggs/CBC)

Holmes's interest in urban planning dates back years — before the Westdale Secondary student's age was even in the double digits.

Reading books about the OMB

He was born in Toronto, but moved to Hamilton when he was nine months old. His single mom, Sterling, is a retired lawyer who focused on social justice cases. Gentrification was pricing them out of Toronto, Holmes said. Hamilton is better, but experiencing more of the same.

The pair have lived the city's housing woes. They've lived in various downtown high-rises, he said, and had various fights at the Landlord and Tenant Board. Right now, they live in a fourteenth-floor apartment at Young and John. It has one bedroom. Holmes takes the bedroom and his mom sleeps on the couch.

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Holmes often spends much of his free time reading about politics, technology and urban planning. Right now, he's reading *My Years as Prime Minister* by Jean Chretien, and recently finished *The Ontario Municipal Board: The Last Trip* by Peter Howden. For a while, he had a website called theBold media, where he wrote about transit, current events, and — of course — urban planning.

His debut at city council chambers [came in 2017](#), when he appeared with his walker in front of councillors. In a quiet voice, he argued that light rail transit (LRT) is accessible and good for the city.

"I could tell how articulate he was in his presentation," said Jason Farr, Ward 2 councillor. "I remember it now, and it was over a year ago."

'A super outlier'

Matthew Green, former Ward 3 councillor, had read Holmes online. In person, he expected "a middle-aged academic."

"Lachlan is an outlier as a resident," Green said. "For a young person, he's a super outlier."

Holmes plans to stay in Hamilton. He knows what sort of city he wants to see. He wants more affordable housing for himself and others, and he sees density as the answer.

- [Television City towers are too tall, planners say, but the developer is already appealing](#)
- [Skelly takes Flamborough-Glanbrook, while NDP sweep rest of Hamilton](#)

By the time he's 30, he said, he wants to see more mixed-use medium- and high-rise buildings, preferably covering some of downtown's plethora of surface parking lots. By that time, he said, he hopes the B line LRT has been running for years, and an A line one is coming to fruition.

He'd also like to look out at downtown from Sam Lawrence Park and see the signature building. Preferably sleekly designed, maybe with a rotating rooftop restaurant. And maybe even taller than the escarpment.

"We're a midsize city, and we'll always be a midsize city," he said. But "I would hope that there is something Hamilton can look at, to be proud of, to say 'That is Hamilton.'"

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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