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Furious Merulla lashes city priorities

Dreaming of stadium instead of protecting citizens, he says

WADE HEMSWORTH

Warning: Readers may find some content offensive

Sunday was a difficult day for thousands of people in Hamilton as torrential rainfall caused flooding across the city.

Nowhere was the problem worse than in east Hamilton, above and below the Mountain. In the heart of the trouble was Ward 4, where Sam Merulla is city councillor.

Merulla said that when Sunday's storms hit, he was on vacation attending a family baptism four hours away, and he returned to deal with 200 phone calls about flooding problems.

Merulla, known as council's most outspoken member, has made a particular issue of the city's bid for the Pan Am Games, including its proposal to build a new stadium in partnership with the federal and provincial governments. The Hamilton Spectator's editorial board supported the bid.

Last winter, Merulla argued that it was "insane" to commit money to a stadium when the city was far behind in basic infrastructure renewal such as sewers, roads and sidewalks.

On Sunday evening, a particularly emotional Merulla contacted the Spectator's newsroom multiple times by e-mail and phone, to say the storm damage proves he was correct. Here is an abridged version of his 12-minute statement to reporter Wade Hemsworth.

Sam Merulla

I hate to say I told you so to the entire city — to the elites and the editorial board of The Hamilton Spectator — but there are those that recognize that we have priorities in this city and those that don't.

I have to say, on the record — and this is all on the record — that I had put forward a motion to ensure that every single cent of every stimulus (dollar in) federal or provincial moneys that were available to the city were allocated to the redevelopment of our infrastructure.

This is not an east end issue. I've been getting calls from the Mountain, from Ancaster, from Binbrook.

This is a gross misconduct of an entire council and a gross misconduct of the entire media in this city, who have been intoxicated by the possibility of having a Pan Am Games that means shit to anyone in this city when they have shit in their basement.

I say to everyone in this city: contact the mayor and your councillor and tell everybody to get their priorities in line.

The reality is the money should be going toward fundamental infrastructure and not sports infrastructure that means absolutely nothing to the quality of life of these people who are swimming in feces today as we speak.

I warned everybody, and I was demonized by the media. I say to everyone that demonized me: to hell with you.

We have people who have been affected, nine, 10 times. They're contacting me in tears. They have barely enough money to put food on their tables, and they have to worry about infrastructure that is failing on them. (It's) no fault of theirs but that of the governing body at City Hall. How can you sleep with yourselves — everybody, including The Hamilton Spectator editorial board?

This is insane. This city has got to wake up and smell the fucking coffee and understand that we are in a crisis from an infrastructure standpoint.

Until we fix the foundation, you can't build a house on it. I'm telling you right now, there is no way that one individual in this city should be having shit in their basement when they're paying their taxes and they're up to (date) and these guys are wanting to build a fucking stadium!

It is a pie-in-the-sky initiative that screws over the hard-working taxpayers of the city.



Hamilton Spectator File Photo

I warned everybody. I brought forward a motion for the federal stimulus money, including provincial money and the city's share, to deal with the basic infrastructure in this city. I got demonized by the media. I got ridiculed by my council colleagues and frankly got defeated at council. I said, "God help you, everyone."

This is the time to be reckoned with. Not one penny of that federal stimulus package included roads or sewer redevelopment. You know what they said? We're not here to fix potholes. You know what I say to them? Fuck you.

We are here to do potholes, because people have shit floating in their basements!

The story is that there literally is a combined blindness to the needs versus the wants. The needs of this city are to ensure that no senior, no person, has feces floating in their fucking basement. And we're going to build a \$150 million stadium!

I just want this recorded, because people were living in a bubble, including your editorial board. That editorial board has their head up their ass.

I was on a four-hour drive to come back and see these residents, and they've got shit in their basements. And you guys want to build a fucking stadium.

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