

Town wants public input on population numbers

By Bill Rea

The Town is being asked to adjust its projected population numbers, but councillors want the public to have input.

A public information meeting is planned for Feb. 20.

Town planners sent a report to council last week, calling on Peel Region to adjust Caledon's 2031 population projections from 108,000 to 113,000 and employment numbers from 46,000 to 49,000. The report also stated the population numbers were to be set at 146,000 for 2041 with employment numbers at 73,000. These numbers are based on the Province's amended growth plan figures for Peel, and planners reported the Region has started a review of its Official Plan to allocate the revised numbers to the area municipalities.

But council voted instead to refer the report back to staff.

Councillor Patti Foley commented the numbers the Province is calling for would open the door to Caledon becoming a city, and she argued that's not what people wanted when they moved here.

"We're being asked to plan by numbers," she remarked.

She also stressed the need to know how much farmland will be lost with this increased population. She said farmland can't be replaced once houses go up, adding the Province didn't think about where food comes from when it came up with its numbers.

Councillor Rob Mezzapelli pointed to the need for public consultation on this "pivotal shift in the future of our community."

"We need to make the public aware," he urged. "Come out and have your voice heard."

"The community has to decide how Caledon grows," he added. "Not the Region, not the Province, but the community."

He also said he has not been told by the Province that the Town can't plan the community as it wants, and suggested a strong message from the public can be passed up the line.

"I just ask that we have our minds open to comments like that from the public," he said.

Councillor Allan Thompson commented on the need for the Town to take a position. Mayor Marolyn Morrison said there will be the meeting, with the issue returning at another council meeting.

Councillor Richard Whitehead supported sending the report back to staff. He also commented on the need to get people involved in the issue.

He recalled the Interim Waste Authority (IWA) that was set up by the Bob Rae government to find a site for a massive garbage dump for Peel. No one paid much attention to the IWA until the actual site selection got going, and then they appreciated what was going on. The discussions about population numbers have been theoretical so far, Whitehead commented. As things get more practical, he said people are going to start paying attention.

He also stressed the need to make sure people understand the Town is being compelled to manage Provincial policy, and not get the idea that council is trying to bring in more urban development. If people want to stop that development, they have to know it's the Province that needs to change policy, not the Town, Whitehead said.

Councillor Doug Beffort said it's important that people in villages like Belfountain, Alton, Caledon, Cataract, etc. understand what these numbers might mean for their areas.

Councillor Richard Paterak observed that the Province has taken the creativity out of planning, giving the Town a calculator to do it instead.

"We are free, as residents ourselves, to speak up at this public meeting," he remarked.