

Anger over proposed factory in SouthFields Village

By Bill Rea

Monarch Plastics Ltd. (MPL) is planning to build a large factory in SouthFields Village, but a lot of residents are upset at the prospect.

They were given some details last Thursday at the quarterly meeting of the SouthFields Village Residents' Group, and that sent the packed house into a virtual uproar.

Mike Clark of Leeswood construction, the firm that will be building the facility, was on hand with some information, and he found himself facing a very angry reception, as did Mayor Allan Thompson and Councillors Johanna Downey and Gord McClure. Much of the indignation came from the fact that residents had not been informed, and that councillors evidently didn't find out about it until just a few weeks ago.

The plant is slated to go on the north side of Highway 410 near Kennedy Road, south of Abbotside Way.

Lands to the west are being eyed for a French Catholic school.

Clark said it will be about 316,000 square feet and will manufacture plastic bottles of various types. The bottles will be transported to various locations to be filled. No filling will take place at the plant.

The process at the plant will take inert plastic pellets and form them into bottles.

Clark said the company has about 16 facilities world-wide. "They picked Caledon for all of the advantages have to offer," he said.

Kenneth Bokor, team member with the residents' group, said the site for the plant is already zoned for prestige industrial. He added no application has gone before the Town yet.

"It's very early in the process," he said, adding the Town has asked there be dialogue with the group.

He also pointed out that since there's no rezoning or amendment to the Town's Official Plan being sought, there will be no requirement to hold a public information meeting. Bokor also said Clark was not required to be at last week's meeting.

Clark told the gathering he's build a number of facilities like this one, many adjacent to residential areas, so they try to engage the people living nearby.

He also said there are always concerns about things like truck traffic, parking, lights at night, etc. "We've taken that all into account," he said.

Clark assured the meeting the development will have minimal impact on residents. The main office will face south (away from homes), and truck parking will be as far south as possible on the site.

As well, there are plans for a 55,000 square foot expansion after three to five years.

The company will be leaving two facilities in Brampton, and consolidating them into this one place.

Bokor said the residents' group has been looking for as much information as possible. He said they have learned the bottle manufacturing operation will involve blow and injection molding. As well, the scraps from the manufacturing will be recycled in the process, so there will be minimal waste from the operation.

He also said chilled water will be used to control temperatures through a closed-loop system. The system is to be inspected monthly by a third party.

Bokor said he had been told no byproducts would be released from compressed air. There will be a ventilation system to control heat inside the plant.

Bokor also said he's toured a similar plant and was pleasantly surprised that workers there did not have to wear protective gear. As well, he stated about 70 per cent of the building will be used for warehousing, with the remainder housing the machinery. He added he's been told there will be no risk of toxins, or a lot of noise coming from the operation.

Downey said she had been on the tour too. She found the operation to be very clean, adding Monarch is committed to the environment.

"Monarch Plastics is going above and beyond," she said. "They want to be good neighbours. They want to be community partners."

Clark told the meeting they will be aiming to have the plant Leading Environmental and Energy Design (LEED) certified, with attention to the building being insulated, and minimizing negative environmental impacts.

Bokor also said he's been told there will be some truck traffic at night, but most of it will be during the day. Clark added there will be about 24 trucks per day.

Despite all the positive words, many at the meeting were not pleased with what they were hearing, with many expressing the view that it was a fait accompli.

Clark replied what they were hearing was what will be applied for in a couple of weeks.

Bokor added a lot of the issues being raised were really for Monarch, and they weren't represented at the meeting. That didn't go over well with some at the meeting. "Doesn't sound like a good neighbour to me," one man charged.

Another said he works in the plastics industry, and he warned of extreme noise and heavy truck traffic.

When it comes to opposing the development, Thompson said the options are limited. The zoning and Official Plan designation for prestige industrial are already in place. He added the Town wants this kind of development along the 410, as opposed to homes. For the proposal to qualify as prestige, all the manufacturing work has to be done inside, and other matters, like truck traffic, have to be addressed.

"They have tests to meet at the Town," Thompson said.

He also said this operation will be similar to Husky Injection Molding Systems in Bolton.

"They are the best corporate neighbour against any residential neighbourhood," he remarked, adding the neighbours love Husky.

One woman called out that Bolton site is covered with trees.

Tom Baskerville, vice-president of development with Coscorp (one of the area developers), pointed out employment uses had always been planned for the lands next to the 410, although one man stated they had always been told it would be a business park.

"No one expected a mammoth industrial building there," one woman charged, adding it was being presented to residents as a done deal.

Another woman said she was concerned about the safety of her two children, calling the proposal "a disaster waiting to happen."

"How can you put a school right next to a plastic factory?" one man demanded.

Clark said there are several cases in Mississauga where schools are next to large warehouse operations.

There were also complaints from the floor that this issue came to light just a couple of weeks after the municipal election.

Clark countered the process started about four weeks before, with Monarch buying the land from Monarch Homes (he said the two companies are not connected, despite the similarity of names) in August. There was no way any politician would have had knowledge of this land deal.

Bokor said he didn't know about it until about 10 days before the meeting.

Downey also pointed out that any company can make applications any time it wants to.

Thompson added since the property is designated for industrial, the Town can comment on the site plan; calling for more trees and controls on traffic. "We've done it many, many times," he declared.

He also told the audience that truck traffic has the advantage of slowing other traffic down. "It's crazy, but it's true," he said.

One woman wondered why there couldn't be another type of operation of the site.

"We haven't heard anyone else buy the land," Thompson said.

"Don't put in this application because the community doesn't want the building here," one woman called out to Clark.

Bokor told the crowd he was not too pleased with something like this going in the area, but added he was not as concerned after the tour.

"At least they've come forward," Thompson added, pointing out Monarch has made it clear what they're doing. The company didn't have to do that, he said, commenting lot of businesses just start building once they have the zoning. "They've come forward on their own to talk to the community."

Thompson couldn't say what the French school board would do about something like this going so close to their site. He did say the board would have to be consulted, adding they were there first.

Assuming the plans are all approved quickly, Clark told the meeting the hope is to have shovels in the ground around the middle of April, with the building completed in November 2015.

Thompson issued a statement Monday, stating the Town's goal is to improve its industrial assessment.

"The Town of Caledon has always been well-positioned for companies to locate in Caledon, close to the major provincial highways," he stated. "Town council and staff have worked hard to position Caledon as a viable, vibrant and flexible place to do business."

He also stated that representatives of Monarch Plastics group has attended preliminary meetings with the Town, and it's understood they will bring forward a site application to permit an employment use on Abbotside Way. Thompson added the zoning of the Monarch property aligns with their intended use. The land has been zoned prestige industrial since May 2008, meaning a rezoning is not required.

"We are pleased to know that Monarch has been engaging with citizens in the local area," he stated. "It's a great step towards building a relationship that can benefit the community and the Town for many years to come."

Those benefits, he said, include significant increase to the tax base, initial development fees, road improvements, commitment and

investment in community facilities such as parks, recreation, tree-planting, etc.

?As the site application comes forward, the Town will work to keep citizens informed of the application process,? he concluded.