

Bolton BIA survives, but future uncertain

Written By SCOTT TAYLOR

By a razor-thin margin, Bolton business owners have voted to continue the Bolton Business Improvement Area rather than disband it.

The Town of Caledon's General Committee received a request from the Bolton Business Improvement Area (BIA) last May to send notices to property owners, and from that response to determine if the organization remains or disbands.

Many members of the organization complained the cost of membership, which is obligatory, is too high for the small amount of benefits they receive.

Under the province's Municipal Act, the Town of Caledon was compelled to conduct an assessment to see if the BIA should be disbanded.

For the BIA to disband, more than half its members representing at least half of the tax levies request it.

"The board had asked the Town to start that process because we had heard there was a lot of discontent about the BIA and the cost of it and is it really, helping my business, etcetera," said Bolton BIA chair and Bolton lawyer Jean Carberry. "So there is a process under the Municipal Act where the Town can canvas members to find what their opinion is. To me, it's unfortunate the way the Municipal Act sets it up in that only the people who do not want the BIA need to respond."

The result was about 48 percent of the members voting for an end to the BIA, but at least 50 percent of those responding is required to quash the organization.

With such a sharp division, the question now is where this leaves the BIA going forward.

"The BIA continues, there's an election for the board happens around the same time of the municipal elections every four years . . . and the BIA will carry on," she said. "To me, whoever it is on the board going forward should very mindful of the fact that almost half of the members want no part of it, and so they really should be trying to keep the costs down and they should be aiming a lot more for partnering a lot more with corporate sponsors, as the organizers of Midnight Madness did last month so that the whole onus of paying for these events doesn't fall on a small group of downtown business owners."

Carberry had critical words for the Town of Caledon and what she described as its disconnect with the BIA.

"I think the Town of Caledon needs to get more involved in partnering with the BIA and organizing events and undertaking things. For example, I know it's a much larger municipality, but Toronto has a whole department that works with the various BIAs within their jurisdiction and contributes both financially and with manpower in organizing events. The Town of Caledon really does nothing."

Carberry said the watering and fertilizing of the plants downtown costs a whopping \$10,000.

"We had asked the Town to help with that because they have a truck that goes around and waters other plants and they didn't even get back to me. I've asked that two or three times."

In an email, Town of Caledon spokesman Tony Maxwell took issue with Carberry's accusations.

"The Town of Caledon has enjoyed a good working relationship with the Bolton BIA and has worked cooperatively to resolve various issues that have come up within the BIA area. Town of Caledon staff are always willing to meet and discuss potential areas of cooperation. Part of a Business Improvement Area's mandate is "to organize, finance, and carry out physical improvements and promote economic development in their district." The Bolton BIA has a budget for the purpose of beautification of its streetscape and that budget includes funding for the watering, planting and upkeep of its planters."

Carberry said she's not sure at this time if she will run again for BIA chair this fall.