

Bolton Village Residents Association wants to be advocates for Caledon's largest urban centre

By Rob Paul

In a large town like Caledon, there are vast needs, and those needs differ based on the area.

Within those areas are communities with distinct interests and residents with concerns specific to where they live, and that's why many of Caledon's communities have groups representing their best interests.

As Caledon's largest urban centre, Bolton is expected to see plenty of development and growth going forward. With that in mind, the Bolton Village Residents Association (BVRA) was recently established.

The BVRA is made up of a Board of Directors who want to be the voice for the residents of Bolton and represent their best interests and biggest concerns, as well as promote community while supporting positive initiatives.

The Board of Directors consists of Sharan K. Basran, Mary Balinov, Judy Bennett, Rob Ricciardi, and Vilma Tarquini.

Having lived in Bolton for over 50 years combined, the Board of Directors has experience in advocating for neighbourhood issues (Basran), has two local business owners (Balinov and Tarquini), a member of Bolton Kin (Bennett), and experience organizing social events with the Bolton Community Crew (Tarquini).

Their mission is to represent Bolton to both municipal and regional government, encourage civic engagement, advocate for issues that matter most to the community, organize social events, and foster relationships between Bolton residents and the rest of Caledon.

'We've really set up to promote and advocate for the interest of residents of Bolton and we're also interested in being a good neighbour and connecting with other residents' associations throughout Caledon to talk about common issues that impact all of us' things like traffic, keeping Caledon green, and supporting our farmers,' said Basran. 'So, we're focused on Bolton, but we're also really interested in working with other groups throughout Caledon.'

Though there are groups in Caledon and Bolton that represent and advocate on major topics for the community, the BVRA is aiming to be the voice on a plethora of topics and to consistently represent how the residents feel on decisions being made.

'There's been a strong history of Bolton residents' groups and they all sort of organize around particular issues and there was really a group of us that felt we wanted to have a more permanent group that would deal with a whole host of issues,' said Basran. 'Typically, the residents' groups focus on specific issues while we want to be a long-term group that deals with a wide-range of topics.'

'There's a group of certain issues that our residents aren't very happy with, and we would like to speak on their behalf and delegate,' said Tarquini.

The group formed because they had been hearing concerns from residents on specific issues, but wanting to have an even better understanding of what the people of Bolton care about and want to see happen, the BVRA is planning a community survey.

'There's a lot of important issues that are happening and we want to speak about them, like traffic, public transit, making sure residents are involved in important issues around development so that our community is being developed in an appropriate manner,' Basran said. 'These are the types of issues a small group of us were hearing about so we think it's really important that the voices of Bolton residents are brought to the table.'

?In light of that, what we're doing is a resident's survey. We have some anecdotal evidence and now as we build our membership we want to go out to the residents in Bolton and ask them what the issues that matter to them are and if they feel our government is addressing these issues or if there's something more that we can do to help with these issues. We want to systematically survey Bolton residents because if we're going to be their voice then we need to know what they care about.?

Some topics of concern are clear, based on conversations in the community, but to ensure that Caledon Town Council's decision-making takes into consideration and reflects what the residents of Bolton feel, the BVRA wants to be there to delegate when it is needed.

?We're hearing questions like, are we investing enough in our community to deal with aging infrastructure? Are we dealing with roads and potholes? We care about the things like that because they're impacting our residents every day,? said Basran. ?What are the levels of services our residents are receiving? Are their needs being met? Because I think what we need to make sure of is that we're investing back into our community and investing in our residents. The first step for us is making sure the things we're hearing about from Town leadership is how our residents feel. That's why we're really excited to survey a broad section of our residents.?

With Caledon's population expected to boom over the next decade, having groups like the BVRA is becoming even more important to ensure decision-makers aren't brushing over the biggest issues and needs of residents in the community.

?We certainly think development is one of the most important issues for sure,? Basran said. ?We think everyone supports development, we just want to make sure it's done in a smart way so that we preserve the character of Bolton and Caledon. We want to make sure this is done with the resident's front and centre. You can't develop without making sure the residents that are already here have their voices heard and ensure their communities are being preserved. We have many long-term residents who have been here for years that are happy to have development as long as it's done in a way that considers their interests.?

?Development has to be done in moderation,? Tarquini said. ?Especially with the population growth, infrastructure and roads are key pieces in development. We will need the infrastructure before we start building homes to address the population. There are many issues in regard to individuals getting around?like look at Highway 50 with all the trucks. We want to make sure infrastructure is addressed for our residents.?

Beyond advocating for the community on key issues, the BVRA is also planning to engage with the community through various initiatives, the first one being a community cookbook for Bolton.

?In addition to more serious topics, we feel it's very important to be positive and the pandemic has taught us that it's important we all come together and become a unified Caledon,? Basran said. ?One of the things we want to do is a cookbook. The last Caledon-wide cookbook that I could find was from 1984, so, we want to commission a new cookbook where all the residents of Caledon can share their treasured family recipes. We want to fundraise to develop this cookbook and then share it throughout the community and then also give funds to a charity. Throughout the pandemic, a lot of us have learned how to cook different things and we think it's very timely. It's something really positive that we think can help unite people.?

With the agriculture industry being the heart and soul of Caledon, the BVRA plans to ensure strong partnerships with local farmers and hopes to develop a collaborative farmers market.

?Another thing we think is really important is to support our farmers in Caledon,? Basran said. ?There's a lot of Farmers Feed Cities initiatives happening and with Bolton being the biggest urban centre in Caledon, we feel we could really support our farmers and promote buying produces from farmers. To do that, we want to support a year-long farmers market?there's already some initiatives underway with the Bolton Downtown Revitalization Project looking to support a farmers market?so we were thinking to develop an ad-hoc committee with farmers to promote our urban centres supporting our farmers through a year-round market.?

With the BVRA just underway, the Board of Directors has big plans, but they know the first step is building a membership so that they can best be the voice for the community they love so dearly.

?Right now, we really want to get the word out and get residents of Bolton to become members so we can hear from them,? said Basran. ?The survey will help us better understand what's important to our members because we want to connect with our residents and advocate for them by being their voices in important matters.?

?We're doing this to give back to our community,? Tarquini said. ?We love Bolton, we love Caledon, and we want to continue to build a positive community.?

The BVRA asks that all residents of Bolton interested in membership contact them at boltonvillageresidents@gmail.com or on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1687832221406668>.