

Caledon Council adopts Age-Friendly Action Plan for growing community

By Rob Paul

With Council hoping to prioritize making Caledon age-friendly for all, they had urbanMetrics Inc. develop a 10-year Age-Friendly Caledon Action Plan. The action plan identifies key priorities and results in the form of short, medium, and long-term goals.

At the May 18 Council Meeting, urbanMetrics Inc. consulting partner Peter Thoma presented the action plan to Council. Council adopted the plan and implementation will begin immediately.

The reason for an age-friendly action plan in Caledon is because the number of older adults (55-plus) in Canada now exceeds the number of youth and are represented as one of the fastest growing segments of the population. Between 2021 and 2031 the number of older adults is expected to increase by over 10,000 in Caledon.

The Age-Friendly Caledon Action Plan is intended to ensure that the Town of Caledon and its community partners are fully prepared to meet the needs of an ageing population base.

In 2013, in anticipation of future growth, the Town retained the services of urbanMetrics Inc. to work with the community in development of the Adult 55-plus Strategic Plan. In September 2015, Council approved the strategic plan as the first step towards becoming an age-friendly community.

Over the five years of the plan, significant progress was made, however as the community changed, the Seniors Task Force recommended that the existing strategy be updated into an Age-Friendly Action Plan, following suit of over 80 Ontario communities.

In July of 2020, the Town again retained the services of urbanMetrics Inc. to develop an action plan that would build on the progress of the Adult 55-plus Strategic Plan and guide Caledon to the next steps towards becoming an Age-Friendly community.

The primary goals and outcomes of the action plan are to remove barriers to participation, strengthen programs and support, enable healthy ageing, build partnerships, and allocate resources.

"This is an action plan that was gathered together based on the insights of staff, residents, community partners across Caledon and we also had an opportunity to speak with all of the members of Council and the Mayor to get appropriate insights in terms of what the needs and expectations of Caledon residents age 55 and over are going forward," said Thoma. "We asked what are the things that the Town of Caledon can do to make the town more age-friendly and ensure it has programs, policies, and procedures in place that will deal with a large and growing constituent of older adults."

Over the last nine months, Town staff consulted the community including one-on-one interviews with the Mayor and Councillors, 30 local community service providers through community engagement sessions, 60 Town and regional staff, and over 300 residents over the age of 55 through a survey and engagement sessions.

Age-Friendly communities, developed by the World Health Organization (WHO), focus their efforts on policies and programs that support eight community dimensions. The Town took the feedback from the engagement and incorporated it into the eight dimensions for their action plan.

The eight dimensions of the action plan are housing, mobility, communication, community and health supports, respect and inclusion, participation, safety and accessibility, and community engagement.

The goals of the plan are to provide more affordable and suitable housing options for older adults, enable more transportation and

mobility options throughout Caledon; promote older adult awareness and engagement in community programs and events; promote expansion of health services that deliver critical programs to older adults and their caregivers; ensure the inclusion of older adults in the decision-making process; build and support local programs that promote social participation with an emphasis on health, friendship, environmental stewardship and life-long learning; remove barriers that limit the use of outdoor spaces and public building for residents with mobility challenges or safety concerns; and provide resources that connect older adults with meaningful volunteer and employment options in Caledon.

The implementation of the plan will require collaboration with a broad-range of community stakeholders, local municipalities, regions, Ontario-based Age-Friendly networks, and Caledon residents, while working with all departments of the Town and collaborating with the Region of Peel.

Staff will provide Council with an annual report and status update and additional information and detailed tactics including timelines and resources will be finalized through annual work plans and the budget process?at this time there's no immediate financial implications.

Knowing the Caledon community is expected to grow substantially over the next few decades, Council wanted to ensure the Age-Friendly Action Plan works in tandem with how the planning committees is operating.

?The province has really adapted age-friendly as a way for municipalities across the province to start thinking about the way the communities are planned, designed, developed, and re-imagined,? said Thoma. ?Certainly, the Age-Friendly Action Plan was developed with the participation of Caledon's planning team and Caledon's planning team is well aware of the policy requirements for age-friendly. It does speak to a need to think differently about the way our communities are designed. The way I think about community and the way communities ought to be planned is now fully informed by an age-friendly lens.?

Wanting to get a better understanding of the positive impact of developing an age-friendly community, Mayor Allan Thompson asked Thoma where a plan like this has worked well previously specifically with affordable housing.

?There are a number of good examples,? Thoma said. ?But the same challenges that exist in Caledon are the same challenges we all read about every day at noisome with the price of real estate and people feeling frozen and locked into their homes without any other options to move. Some municipalities have been able to increase the number of options that are available, and I think that's really what the action plan is looking to do. It's trying to make sure we're making available a full range of options, including things that are out of the box.

?In terms of what communities have done really well, communities in the GTA like Cobourg, for example, is developing a number of really innovative communities and a lot of that comes from the community responding to people downsizing. Wasaga Beach also comes to mind, there are a number of ?lifestyle communities' that exist there and Caledon really does have some interesting precedence for building communities. The caveat is always how do you do it affordably? That's the nut that has to be cracked here and we developed some actions that hopefully the municipality will be able to encourage developers to think differently about the types of housing options they're delivering.?

Council was pleased with Thoma's presentation and it including deliverable goals set for the short and long-term and they're committed to ensuring Caledon is age-friendly and know the plan is necessary for the growing community.

?We wanted to see those actionable items, things that we can actually use as a benchmark to show how we are growing and becoming more age-friendly,? said Councillor Jennifer Innis, who sits on the Senior's Task Force Committee. ?We look forward to this hard work coming to fruition in the future.?