

Caledon Council ?disavows? MZO request on industrial park development

By **Zachary Roman**

Caledon Council has distanced itself from a request made by former mayor Allan Thompson for a Ministerial Zoning Order (MZO) for an industrial park development in the last term.

At Caledon Council's May 23 meeting, Ward 3 Councillor Doug Maskell brought forward a motion to ask the Province for the revocation of the MZO issued for a 502-acre industrial park development; and, disavow the actions Thompson took to get the MZO in question issued.

In January 2022, the Rice Group requested that Council apply for a MZO from Ontario Minister of Housing and Municipal Affairs Steve Clark for its proposed industrial park between Torbram and Airport roads, north of Mayfield Road.

This request was referred to Town staff, so they could bring additional information back to Council at a future meeting. However, before the request was brought back to Council, the MZO for the development was granted by Clark on September 9, 2022.

It was later discovered that on July 22, 2022, without Council or staff direction, Thompson personally wrote a letter to Clark asking for the MZO.

?When then-Mayor Allan Thompson drafted and delivered his letter to Minister Clark with his personal request for this MZO, he circumvented established Council practices and undermined the people's confidence in the political process,? said Maskell.

Maskell said while some might say it's too late, and that the MZO is already in effect, publicly repudiating Thompson's actions would show that the current Caledon Council is committed to transparency and accountability.

Maskell said Clark should revoke the MZO because neither Caledon Council nor Town of Caledon staff provided support for it.

?Council must? protect the residents of Torbram Road whose property values and quality of life have been significantly affected by this MZO,? said Maskell. ?This motion is for? the residents of Caledon who trust we are acting in their best interests.?

Ward 5 Councillor Tony Rosa said he applauded Councillor Maskell for bringing forward his motion.

?The actions taken by former Mayor Allan Thompson, he acted alone, and he shouldn't have at that time. I really don't respect that process,? said Rosa. ?To go down this road, what is it going to cost our taxpayers??

Rosa said he thinks revoking the MZO is a battle that Caledon isn't going to win and expressed worry at spending Town resources only to lose in the end.

Maskell said all he's really asking for is the cost of a stamp to send a letter to Clark asking him to revoke the MZO; that he knows as a municipality Caledon can't stop an MZO. He said there's precedent of an MZO being revoked as it recently happened in Pickering.

?I'm not implying at all that I want the Town to fight this MZO or take it to court,? said Maskell.

Regional Councillor, Wards 1, 2, and 3 Christina Early thanked Maskell for bringing forward his motion. She said she doesn't think there's a single member of Caledon's Council that condones Thompson seeking an MZO in isolation.

However, Early said the MZO is for lands that are part of Peel's settlement area boundary expansion and are now deemed to be employment lands.

Early asked Mayor Annette Groves what would happen if the MZO was revoked.

"We're getting the blame and having to take the hit for this," said Groves, noting she spoke to Region of Peel staff to get an understanding of what would happen to the subject lands if the MZO was revoked.

"The lands subject to the Rice MZO are now included as part of the urban area in the approved Regional Official Plan," said Groves, reading from an email sent to her by Region of Peel staff. "The MZO identifies the uses permitted on the land if the MZO was revoked the lands would still be included in the urban area."

Groves said this is key as even if Clark revoked the MZO, Caledon would still have to deal with the Rice Group's application. Groves said if Caledon has to have heavy industrial developments, the Tullamore area is the most suitable area for them.

"The residents who are impacted by this development we need to make sure that we work with those residents so that we can mitigate some of those impacts," said Groves, noting she attended a meeting with affected residents and the Rice Group.

She said it went well and dialogue is ongoing between the two parties.

Groves said in Caledon's housing pledge that it was mandated to submit to the Province, it asked that the Province issue no more MZOs in Caledon.

"I've never been in support of MZOs, however, this one, I believe we're a little too late these lands are within those urban boundaries they're still going to move forward with development," said Groves.

Maskell said the principle of his motion is key, and that Caledon could be setting a precedent for other municipalities.

Ward 2 Councillor Dave Sheen said he couldn't support Maskell's motion because he believes parts of it are based on inaccurate information. He said Thompson's letter asking for the MZO speaks for itself, before reading an excerpt from it:

"While Town Council has paused on advancing applications until the official plan is complete, I feel that having this application wait for that work to be completed may deter the applicant to move this significant opportunity for economic and job growth to another community," read Sheen from Thompson's letter. "I am personally asking that you consider, as Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, using your legislative authority to advance this project by issuing a Minister's Zoning Order. By doing so, I believe the Town, Region, and Province will realize the significant benefits outlined in this letter."

Sheen said he doesn't believe Thompson overstepped any ethical or legal boundaries, and that Thompson didn't try to pretend he was speaking on behalf of Council. He said it was clear Thompson was speaking for himself. Sheen said Thompson did not break Council's Code of Conduct.

"If the residents of Caledon want to complain about the MZO, they should be complaining to Minister Clark," said Sheen. "Ultimately it's his decision a letter from residents in Caledon can probably do more than a letter from this Town Council."

Sheen said Caledon should be looking ahead, not back, and "what's been done has been done."

"Development is going to displace people, and the Town of Caledon is looking ahead to decades of development and growth," said Sheen. "This kind of displacement and upset is going to continue, but that's part of what development means."

Rosa said Council needs to implement policies so that something similar requests for an MZO aren't able to happen again.

Maskell said he'd be willing to make an amendment to his motion and cut it into two pieces: the first being the portion where

Council could disavow Thompson's request, and the second being the portion where Council would vote on asking Clark to revoke the MZO.

Council then began discussing the first half of the split motion, which was: ?Now therefore be it resolved that the current Council disavow and repudiate the action taken, in July 2022, by former Mayor Allan Thompson, relating to the MZO filed on lands known municipally as 12245 Torbram Road by reaffirming its commitment to abide by the Code of Conduct for Members of Council.?

Sheen said he would not support the motion because all it accomplishes is sully the reputation of Thompson, and that it goes without saying that Council will follow its code of conduct.

Groves said she would support the motion because the former mayor's actions put Council in a very difficult position. She said Thompson gave her a copy of the letter he wrote to Clark on his last day in office.

?It wasn't the right thing to do,? said Groves.

Council voted in favor of disavowing and repudiating Thompson's actions with regards to the MZO, with Councillors Nick de Boer, Mario Russo, and Sheen opposed. Mayor Groves and Councillors Rosa, Maskell, Cosimo Napoli, and Early were the votes in favour. Councillor Lynn Kiernan was absent from the meeting.

Council voted against sending a letter to Clark asking him to revoke the MZO, with only Maskell voting in favour.

A public meeting about the development is set for June 13 at 7 p.m. at Caledon's Town Hall in Caledon East. Residents can also join the public meeting online on the Town's website.

Groves said she encourages people to come out to the meeting and have their voices heard.

Those interested in being notified about the Rice Group development as it moves forward can send an email to planning@caledon.ca. Written comments and questions about the development can also be sent to this email address.