

Caledon Council in favour of ward boundary review process

Written By ALYSSA PARKHILL

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

The Town of Caledon is currently in the midst of a thorough ward boundary review following a recommendation made by municipal staff earlier this year to look into the community's lines.

Caledon Council currently sits with nine members, including a mayor, four regional councillors and four local area councillors. The Town was divided into the existing five wards it currently has back in January of 1994, and has not been modified since.

Caledon has seen extensive growth in recent years, with the community's population more than doubling since 1994. The population 26 years ago sat at 39,150, and is projected to hit 89,000 by next year.

With this constant growth, the Town sees a review of the ward boundaries as a 'necessary process' to ensure fair representation to all Caledon residents.

'Given the length of time that has lapsed since the last review, and the fact that population growth in certain wards has grown, staff believe that undertaking a ward boundary review at this time is appropriate,' said Amanda Fusco, acting Town Clerk and Manager of Legislative Services, in her report to Council.

In February of this year, Town staff came to Council with the recommendation to commence a Request for Proposal (RFP) process to gather consultants to undertake the ward boundary review.

Watson and Associates and Dr. Robert Williams have been chosen by the Town to conduct the review. Together, they have conducted over 20 ward boundary reviews in Ontario. Watson and Associates is made up of municipal economists, urban planners and accountants, while Dr. Robert J. Williams himself is a professor of political science at the University of Waterloo and is known for his expertise in municipal ward systems.

So how will this review be carried out?

The project includes a timeline of nine tasks beginning with Project Initiation, Information Gathering and Research and ends with Preparation of Final Report. The team of consultants will conduct thorough background research along with interview town staff and elected officials.

They will assess the current ward boundaries and create alternative designs. Public consultation holds a significant part of the Phase 1 process.

'It is essential that the ward boundary review considers input from the public to ensure it serves and reflects the community,' said Mayor Allan Thompson.

Caledon councillors are mostly looking forward to hearing from the public through the consultation process. Many shared similar sentiments on how the review is impacting them.

Ward 2 Area Coun. Christina Early stated, 'The ward boundary review is a legislated process that aims to provide effective representation for Caledon residents. Given the changing landscape and population growth projected for Caledon; coupled with the fact that the last review took place in 1994, it is timely for this process to take place.'

She added, "I look forward to the public information meetings and encourage involvement of Caledon residents to gain a stronger understanding of what our residents feel in regard to the current and future wards."

Ward 3 and 4 Regional Coun. Jennifer Innis shared similar words commenting, "I encourage residents and businesses to participate in the process as there potentially could be an impact on the effectiveness of their representation. I look forward to hearing their thoughts and concerns on this important matter for Caledon's future."

Ward 1 Regional Coun. Ian Sinclair shared his experiences of past ward boundary reviews he was a part of back in the early 80's, where minor changes involving wards shifting took place.

"There has been significant population growth in Wards 2, 3, 4, and 5 since over the last 35 years. In addition, as urbanization has occurred, the common community of interest, which used to exist, does not hold across Caledon. Bolton and Mayfield West residents' thinking is now different from residents in Ward 1," he said.

When asked if there are any changes that could or should be made, Sinclair commented that Wards 2 and 4, which are inside the Niagara Escarpment Plan, should be turned into one ward.

"With the considerable growth demanded in the 'White Belt', the areas between May considersfield Rd and the south boundary of the Green Belt Plan, Ward 3, Caledon East could be included in Ward 1 as a means of maintaining representation by population," he said. "Ward 5 could be expanded up to Castleberg Side Road."

Councillors are hopeful that the community will participate in the process, and that they understand the importance of their voice.

"I sincerely hope voters are not worried, the review itself is a Caledon initiative, and again it's important that we hear from as many residents as possible," said Ward 1 Area Coun. Lynn Kiernan.

Coun. Sinclair again shared some insight on what changes or options there are for the future.

"Mississauga councillors have taken strict rep-by-pop position that all of Caledon should only have one regional representative. This would mean just whoever is the Mayor of Caledon sitting at Peel and attempting to read all committee reports, which would be an impossible task. It may be that Caledon should drop a regional representative, shifting the representative to Brampton, which has some regional councillors representing 135,000 residents," he stated. "Another option may be to expand Peel Council, while maintaining Caledon at five members. There has been little discussion among Caledon councillors on these issues. The Ford government has stated their intention to impose rep-by-pop on municipalities that cannot solve their own representation issues."

Five sections are being considered during this process, including effective representation, representation by population, communities of interest, future popular trends and physical and natural boundaries.

Open houses are being planned for this month for further discussions and allow the public to share their opinions and views on the review.

For more information, please visit Caledon.ca.