

Caledon needs vision

A few days ago, I attended a public meeting at the invitation of the area councillor to hear a developer's proposal for a potential seniors' village.

The preliminary plans presented was for 3,000 seniors living on 200 acres adjacent to the village of Caledon, in the Greenbelt. The developer's aim was to engage citizens before applying for significant changes to the Town's zoning bylaws and exemptions from the Greenbelt standards.

Attractive catch phrases were used for the proposed development. Lots of green spaces. Variety of housing units not currently available to the ballooning number of seniors.

We all know that the number of seniors is increasing exponentially. Who is planning for them? I don't know.

My concern is that without an imaginative vision for the whole of Caledon, the bits and pieces do not make Caledon what it could be in the future.

Where is the vision for the Town? It is essential to have an overall vision, so individual proposals can blend together into a harmonious whole.

Presently, landowners and developers plan for their own interests on their particular piece of Caledon. Does it benefit Caledon? It seldom does, yet it may.

As long as the approval process is followed, benefit to our Town is seldom achieved. Who watches out for our interests?

There is pressure from the Province for Caledon to absorb a large number of new residents. Who is envisioning imaginative urban design solutions so we can accommodate them, while improving our town?

Perhaps my experiences will inspire some of us to demand planning for Caledon: Not reacting to and manipulating piecemeal applications, but active planning we can all support. Successful growth needs a vision and planning strategy for a better town that benefits all.

My experiences may inspire our decision makers. In Berlin, I collaborated with Walter Gropius to create a vision for a large bombed-out section of the city. We created a concept which was debated by the community and approved by politicians.

When we proceeded to design a large component in detail as architects, all of the circumstances and context were known. Approval was swift as context was honoured.

In Caledon, nothing like that exists. No vision, as far as I know. Individual projects are processed without relying on an overall vision and fitting into a desirable community we deserve. Very seldom do they benefit Caledon.

I also had an interesting experience in Pakistan, where we designed a new satellite community for Karachi for the emerging middle class. Canadian technologies were used. Time to do the same in Caledon and use the best examples from around the globe.

As architects, we start with a concept, a vision that guides our creative efforts. When I was designing the Eaton's Centre, there was no planning vision for that part of Toronto. So we created it. The results speak for themselves. As a newcomer to Toronto, I walked Yonge Street many, many times, imagining how such a huge complex would enrich everyone's experience of city life. In England, we designed a city centre for Cambridge by creating a vision for the city's growth and our designs fitted I with it. Approvals were easy and quick.

The plans for the seniors' village are early and appear opportunistic in the present circumstances. Nothing more can be expected as no larger framework exists for Caledon.

There's so much talent in Caledon; it should be harnessed for creating a vision for the town that will guide the town's growth. And grow it will.

Dreams can be realized. To bring light and sunshine to every level of the Eaton's Centre was realized, as was the park on King Street in the First Canadian Place with the waterfall, mature trees and rest areas. They did not exist in any plans or in the planners' and decision-makers' imaginations, until we introduced them to it.

Time to create a vision for a healthy, green and prosperous Caledon, and stop the piecemeal approach to planning it. The planning staff could be happier too, not occupied with picking on individual applications, but creating a wonderful vision for our town.

Laszlo Nemeth,

Caledon East