

Caledon not keen on dealing with facilitator

By Bill Rea

Efforts are under way to get a provincial facilitator to address the Bolton Residential Expansion Study (BRES), but Caledon councillors are fighting it.

A motion was put forth at last Thursday's meeting of Peel Regional Council to encourage impacted landowners and election officials in Caledon to work with a facilitator to discuss long-standing issues dealing with BRES. It was moved by Brampton Mayor Linda Jeffrey and seconded by Mississauga Mayor Bonnie Crombie, after a 90-minute in-camera session. But the Caledon contingent at the Region were able to get enough support to have the matter deferred.

Mayor Allan Thompson said the following day he was disappointed at what went on at the Region.

‘That’s not what Regional government’s about,’ he commented. ‘It’s about doing the right thing.’

Although he was upset with what went on at the council table, the mayor had nothing but good things to say about the way his colleagues from Caledon handled the matter.

‘I’m very, very proud of my councillors,’ he declared. ‘It was a team effort. We did our homework.’

One of the problems Thompson cited with the facilitator is it’s not clear what that person will be doing. ‘I don’t know what we’re in for,’ he remarked, adding he would want to know what the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH) has in mind.

The process regarding BRES has been a long and costly one, Thompson said, adding he wants to see things progress.

The issue was raised last Thursday over a staff progress report on BRES. The lands identified for the growth include a large chunk of land north of King Street, between The Gore and Huber Station Roads, as well as rounding out areas near Duffy’s Lane and King, Regional Road 50 near Columbia Way and south of Glassgow Road near the future Bolton Arterial Road (BAR).

Implementing BRES will require an amendment to the Region’s Official Plan, meaning there will have to be a public information meeting. The staff report said there are a couple of matters that need to be addressed before than meeting can be scheduled. They include holding a stakeholders’ workshop with senior provincial staff and Regional councillors to consider options for financing the growth. Staff added they are still waiting for comments on BRES from MMAH.

Fabio Mazzocco, of Argo Development corporation, made a deputation, stating his company owns about 200 acres involved with BRES, including lands being eyed for a future GO Transit train station, with an eventual connection to Union Station in Toronto.

They are also planning to facilitate retail and office development in the area, in the hope of taking more cars off the road.

He wasn’t pleased with the thought of delaying things, commenting the Region’s Growth Management Committee’s work doesn’t have to be done before the public meeting. He said the process is public and all the required information should be available before council deals with the Official Plan Amendment.

Mazzocco told Mississauga Councillor Nando Iannicca the timeline for the GO station is on the 25-year horizon for Metrolinx, but if development in the community is allowed to progress, the timing could be advanced.

Maurizio Rogato, of the land development division of Solmar Development Corp., told councillors there are lands south of Healey Road that his company is anxious to develop, pointing out the lands that are part of the BRES are outside the Region’s master servicing plan. He said it will be expensive to develop those lands, adding there will also have to be a grade separation on King Street at the railway crossing west of Bolton. Solmar’s lands can be easily serviced by extending infrastructure already in place to the south in Brampton.

He also pointed out staff has said there will not be any development on the BRES lands until at least 2021, but commented that there have been troubles lately with the business community in Bolton, meaning it will be a long time before there’s any real development to address that.

He also said servicing the Solmar lands will help vitalize the proposed employment lands to the east by permitting mixed land uses in the area.

Rogato observed there have been refinements to the GTA West Corridor Environmental Study area, which means there can be some development processing in anticipation of the preferred route being announced later this year. He said employment uses should always follow highway corridors. ‘That’s simply Planning 101,’ he remarked.

The possible routes that are being considered cross lands that are owned by Solmar, he said

Rogato said MMAH has appointed the facilitator to work on resolving long-standing conflicts, and he said Solmar is willing to work with that process. He also pointed out it will be a confidential process, and the appropriate parties have been informed of it.

Thompson suggested Solmar has been involved with the appeal on the Ministerial Zoning Order (MZO) that was issued regarding the large Canadian Tire development in Bolton (Rogato said it’s the residents of Your Voice for Bolton who have appealed, without

any help from Solmar).

He also said the Solmar proposal makes sense, but added there's been a lengthy process, adding the GTA's West Corridor has complicated things.

He also observed that during the Canadian Tire discussions, there was a lot of concern expressed that it was going too close to homes to the north.

Looking at how close the Solmar lands are to the employment area, Thompson predicted there will be a lot of complaints if homes go up there.

'I'm going to tell you that Your Voice for Bolton will go completely ballistic to think that we're going to put residential again that close to an industrial corridor,' the mayor said.

He added people in last fall's election made it clear that they wanted a process that was open and transparent, and he didn't know of any elected official in Caledon who would go along with the facilitator. He said the public would have no chance for input in that. Thompson also said there has been no official invitation for the Town to take part in the facilitation.

Rogato said lawyers for the Town and Region have been informed.

Director of Legal Services and Regional Solicitor Patrick O'Connor told Councillor Jennifer Innis lawyers have asked that a formal request to participate be made to the Region, and that has not yet happened.

Innis pointed out the lands in question are in her ward, and she knows the community well, having knocked on doors throughout during the fall election. She heard loud and clear that having a provincial facilitator involved with BRES would circumvent the public process.

Councillor Annette Groves agreed the lands are in Innis's ward, but it's her ward that will feel most of the impacts.

She also said many in the community came together in opposition of the MZO for Canadian Tire.

Groves couldn't see putting so many people close to industrial or commercial development like that.

She also had problems with the facilitator, pointing out it doesn't allow for public process.

There were also questions raised about appeals to the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB), with the Regional Official Plan amendment to allow growth in Mayfield West being appealed. Rogato told Groves Solmar has started that appeal, but the company is not party to the appeal involving Canadian Tire.

In addition, he told Crombie Solmar has been trying to get its development in Bolton moving for about 12 years.

He also told Crombie the company would not drop its appeal if the region agreed to the facilitator, but he said that could help settle the appeals.

Jeffrey, who was Municipal Affairs Minister at the time, said she was the one who issued the MZO for Canadian Tire.

'I'm not sorry,' she said. 'I did the right thing, I know that.'

She also pointed to the need to provide direction with a facilitator, commenting she knows that process works. She said this is a complicated matter, with a lot at stake.

Councillor Johanna Downey wondered what could be expected from a facilitator. Rogato said he couldn't get into too much detail, since it's a confidential process. But he said it would be more cost-effective than going through OMB, leading to an 'amicable, resolved outcome.'

Innis said members of the public were not aware of the facilitation idea and had not had the chance to make deputations.

She successfully moved that the matter be deferred until the Ministry makes a formal request for the Region to take part in Facilitation.

Crombie said the process doesn't work that way.

O'Connor said there would be nothing wrong with the province making that request.

'I think the decision was the right decision,' Groves said the following day, adding she's not in favour of having the public excluded from the process.

'They have a say because it's their community,' she said.

Innis later said she was disappointed with the way things went, commenting it's odd for an upper-tier municipality to ask the lower tier to do something it's not doing.