

Caledon still standing against facilitation

By Bill Rea

Caledon councillors are sticking to their guns, and that was good news to just about everyone who attended Tuesday night's meeting. Councillors voted to continue to resist participating in facilitation in dealing with Bolton employment land expansion. This reiterated a stand taken late last month, which put Caledon at odds with some Peel Region representatives from Brampton and Mississauga. Mississauga Councillor Carolyn Parrish put forth a motion June 11, calling on the Town to pick up all costs related to land use matters going to the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB), as well as costs for infrastructure related to the Bolton Residential Expansion Study (BRES) and that Regional staff and solicitors take part in facilitation. Caledon's five representatives at the Region walked out of the meeting before the vote could be taken, thus breaking quorum (a representative of each of the three municipalities must be present for there to be quorum).

Regional council is due to meet again this morning (Thursday).

There was a packed house at the special Town council meeting Tuesday night, which was called at the last minute to address the matter.

"We ran out of options," Mayor Allan Thompson told the audience. "We prorogued Regional council."

Council heard from several deputations Tuesday night, most of them supporting of the actions taken.

Tom Dolson, representing the Alloo Landowners' Group, said some of the councillors in Brampton and Mississauga fail to grasp the planning challenges that face Caledon. He said there's a long list of Provincially regulated requirements that have to be complied with, which is not the case with urban municipalities, and he said many people in Caledon feel frustrated by what they have to go through.

Referring to the motion at the June 11 Regional council meeting, Dolson said Parrish (he didn't use her name) had said three of the Caledon representatives had previously voted in favour of facilitation. He called that statement "misguided, to say the least."

The three councillors said they would support it if the whole council did, and they voted not to, "which was their right."

Dolson also charged councillors should not allow "a select few" to disrupt an open planning process.

"We admire the resolve of our councillors," he said.

Planning consultant Glen Schnarr, representing Argo Development Corporation, as well as some of the land owners involved with BRES, observed that facilitation is supposed to be a voluntary process, pointing out it's aimed at bringing groups together to try and reach agreement and avoid lengthy OMB hearings. If the issue does end up at OMB, comments made at facilitation can't be used at the hearing.

Schnarr stressed his clients are not opposing Regional Official Plan Amendment (ROPA) 28, which would expand the settlement area of Bolton by bringing in more employment land, but they would be opposed to using ROPA 28 to add residential lands. He said the Town has already done a separate exercise to address residential; namely BRES. He added detailed studies were conducted as part of BRES, involving planners, engineers and environmentalists. As well, traffic and servicing issues were considered.

Schnarr was still supporting that process, adding the Region had declared the application for BRES complete. They are waiting for a public information meeting to be scheduled on the matter.

He said facilitation could be used to undermine the work that's been done with BRES.

He added Municipal Affairs and Housing Minister Ted McMeekin has stated facilitation is inappropriate for an issue that's still part of a public process.

Schnarr observed that there's an argument that facilitation would save costs if it avoids the OMB hearing. But he added it could impact Argo's status through BRES. He added Argo has agreed to front end the costs for water and waste water, which would save Peel about \$52 million.

Former councillor Ian Sinclair commented on Parrish's motion from June 11, commenting, "this whole matter and the debate was conducted without courtesy."

He added that while the majority is supposed to rule, the minority is to be treated with respect. He also said the motion was a contravention of the Region of Peel Act and the regional Official Plan.

Sinclair urged councillors to make all attempts to quash the motion.

Area resident Malcolm Campbell supported Caledon's stand.

"This is a Caledon decision, and not one to be dictated to us by the Region," he declared.

But he had a few problems, pointing out there's been no clear word on what facilitation would cost. "It's only cheaper if it's successful," he said, adding there's also been no word as to who pays for it.

Chris Barnett of DLA Piper, external counsel for the Town on this matter, said anything that comes out of facilitation would likely be appealed. OMB hearings dealing with growth management tend to be lengthy and expensive, he added.

Councillor Jennifer Innis observed that the June 11 motion does not reflect the Region, since it didn't pass.

Barnett had a hard time giving Councillor Rob Mezzapelli a ball-park figure on how long facilitation could last.

"I don't know what's on the table," he said. "I don't know who's at the table."

He added the process could be brief or take a couple of weeks.

Councillor Annette Groves commented that Parrish's motion had stated that Caledon was refusing to take part in facilitation, calling that "a little misleading."

She added the intent of the motion was to change what had already been done.

Tuesday's meeting was arranged at the last minute, but Councillor Doug Beffort sent out mass emails telling constituents of it, and he was impressed with the response he received. He said he got some 150 emails of support.

He also cited the previous Regional motion that stated facilitation would be entered if the Town agreed. The Town held a meeting and made its decision, and Beffort expressed puzzlement that Parrish's motion wasn't ruled out of order.

Innis said when she walked out of the Regional council meeting, she was acting in the interests of the community and Region. She added Parrish's motion doesn't respect the position of the Ministry.

"It's supporting one developer over another, without fair, open, public process," she added.

Councillor Johanna Downey called the motion "very punitive."

"I felt that the Town did its due diligence," Mezzapelli commented, adding the planning decisions were well-researched and peer-reviewed. He added Parrish's motion "put me beside myself, to put it mildly."

He added there was strong public feedback against facilitation.

Councillor Barb Shaughnessy reflected back on when she decided to run for Regional council last year.

"Little did I know I was going to walk into the lion's den," she remarked.

"Caledon is being bullied and being bullied harder than it's ever been bullied in the past," she declared, adding this is becoming a discussion of governance, as opposed to planning.

"I'm going to stand up for what's right," she said. "I don't see any upside in doing facilitation."

"Caledon, I love you, and we're going to keep up the good fight," she added.