

Chamber of Commerce presents local business frustrations to Council

By Riley Murphy

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The Caledon Chamber of Commerce recently appeared before Caledon Council, presenting its findings from a member roundtable event and a business challenges survey.

These were held to listen to the business community, identify recurring barriers, and present actionable insights.

During the presentation, Caledon Chamber of Commerce President Marion Upshall shared many of the frustrations faced were not isolated to one industry but were systemic.

“We consistently heard similar concerns, whether it is retail, service providers, hospitality, or professional services,” says Upshall.

The Chamber consists of 223 members, of whom 77 per cent are businesses with 1 to 10 employees.

In their presentation, the Chamber of Commerce revealed that the top three challenges businesses reported to be facing were rising costs, transportation/infrastructure issues, and access to customers/market visibility.

Upshall noted “little transportation opportunities in Caledon” affect the local labour pool and customer access.

“Traffic congestion from the significant volume of truck traffic moving through our major corridors continues to be one of the most pressing concerns for our community,” she said. “Our key roads are increasingly burdened, creating delays for residents, employees, customers, and goods movement alike. This not only discourages people from traveling across Caledon to shop, dine, or access services, but also impacts workforce attraction and retention as potential employees may be less inclined to commute to or seek employment in our area due to ongoing transportation challenges.”

She noted one of the most frequent sources of frustration for businesses was navigating government systems, which they described as overly complicated, unclear, and often too slow.

“They want to spend less time figuring out bureaucracy and more time running and growing their businesses,” said Upshall.

Based on the feedback, the Chamber presented four opportunities for action.

The first was to improve navigation and communication by creating a more centralized business resource, such as a Small Business Enterprise Centre (SBEC).

The next step was to develop a visible, coordinated shop local campaign through Town and Chamber partnerships.

The third is to continue strong advocacy for local businesses at the regional and provincial levels, and finally, to have ongoing communication and transparency with the business community.

“Our businesses are resilient, innovative, and deeply invested in this community. With stronger collaboration between the Town, Chamber, and business community, we can create an environment where businesses don’t just survive but truly thrive,” said Upshall.

Councillors shared their thoughts on the feedback received.

When it comes to the transportation frustrations voiced, Councillor Tony Rosa noted the new Argo electric bus minibus service, which will launch this September.

He added he feels more business profiling should be done to educate the community on local businesses, with a possible opportunity for collaboration with the Town's Economic Development department.

Councillor Mario Russo echoed that point, adding a synergistic partnership between the two could create great strides.

Councillor Christina Early posed the possibility of operations training for businesses to understand how to grow to the next level, and Chair of the Board of the Caledon Chamber of Commerce, Hazel Piacentini, responded that they themselves have been considering hosting business training for local owners.

"I want to be able to help them right from the start to be able to do that with the help of larger organizations to be able to come in and mentor," she said. "That's what we're working on, and that's what we would like to be able to roll out."

Another issue raised during the meeting was Caledon's future growth and the welcoming of over 200,000 residents over the coming decades.

Rosa says with these new residents, the housing pledge also discusses the 125,000 new jobs that Caledon is expected to create.

"When you talk about mentorship, I think we also need to work with the businesses that exist here today, who have potential to bring their business to the next level, who have potential to grow their businesses and create more work and more positions within organically, because that can also make a huge contribution to that 125,000 jobs," said Rosa.

Manager of Business Attraction and Investment with Planning and Development Ben Roberts said as Caledon continues to grow, they need the resources in place to support new and existing businesses in the community.

"We continue to advocate any chance that we have, speaking with our provincial representatives, to have [a] Small Business Enterprise Centre, within our community to support our companies," says Roberts. "We still continue to work well with our current specs that offer services to our community through both Brampton and Orangeville. However, ultimately having something within our community within a distance which is close by, that would meet our needs best."

Councillor Doug Maskell said it is "frustrating" to see smaller municipalities with small business enterprise centres, while Caledon remains without one.

In the meantime, Roberts said they continue to look at expanding the services they currently offer, such as the Growth Wheel program offered at the Humber River Centre.

Growth Wheel is a cloud-based tool that helps business owners set priorities and take steps toward their goals.

As well as the Business Retention Expansion Program, Roberts adds they currently have a group of four students who will be going out into the community to collect information on new businesses, which, in turn, will create conversations where businesses can voice their needs and possible frustrations.

Their partnership with Toronto Metropolitan University's DMZ incubator, the DMZ Caledon Business Incubator for Caledon entrepreneurs, continues to be in place.