

Clash continues over 'freight village' concept

By Bill Rea

A reference to a 'freight village' Mayor Allan Thompson made in an interview for a story that appeared in Business View magazine has taken on something of a life of its own.

It was discussed at some length at last Tuesday's meeting of Caledon Council, and heated remarks have followed, both from Thompson and Councillors Annette Groves and Barb Shaughnessy. They have included suggestions the matter is being used for political gain in an election year.

'Annette and Barbara are trying to create an election platform,' Thompson told the Citizen Friday.

The article, part of a series on sustainable communities in Canada, was in the Feb. 13 issue of the magazine, and when interviewed, Thompson pointed to many initiatives the Town has been working on, including references to 'a freight village.'

'Our new Official Plan is in the works, and will be ready within two years,' the Mayor was quoted as saying in the article. 'It encompasses a huge expansion of employment areas. We're going to have business parks, but also a freight village - the first ever in the GTA. A freight village is a business hub. The most intrusive industrial part is in the centre core, with outer rings supported by smaller business parks.'

'It's a major undertaking and I'm quite excited!' he added.

In a statement he issued March 12, Thompson said the article was focusing on things that makes Caledon a great place, such as natural heritage, innovation in agriculture, becoming a connected community, the growing craft beer and cider industries, etc. He also said he's been receiving positive comments about the article, as well as questions along the lines of, 'What does a freight village mean?'

Thompson explained in the statement that the southern part of Caledon is near the CN intermodal yard, which could be developed into a business hub that could incorporate a freight village.

'This would alleviate truck traffic and congestion on our roads, support local employment growth and it could help us become economically sustainable,' he stated.

'It's important to note that a freight village would not be developed in a residential area, such as Bolton or Palgrave,' Thompson added. 'It would be planned for an area designated to employment and industrial uses.'

Thompson also released a statement last Thursday from Sabbir Saiyed, manager of transportation system planning with Peel Region, in which he stated the Region has been looking at the development of a Peel Enterprise Zone, which would be based on the concept of a freight village. The goals of such a zone would include supporting employment and economic development initiatives; redirecting truck traffic away from residential areas and closer to the airport, highways and other infrastructure for the major movement of goods; and mitigating impacts on communities and improving the quality of life for residents by reducing the number of trucks on local roads.

But there appear to be indications that some in the community are viewing a freight village as a fait accompli.

Groves brought it up at last week's Council meeting, commenting that she's been hearing from people wondering what a freight village is, when it was approved and where it's going.

Thompson said nothing has been passed, adding the issue has been discussed at Peel Region. An area like Tullamore, well away from residential areas, would be considered. He stressed there would still be a lot of studies and other work that would have to be done.

'It will take years for something to happen,' he added. 'It's something that needs to be looked at.'

Shaughnessy said there had been a report from 2010 that she found at Peel Region referring to freight villages. She understood they needed rail and water to work, as well as being close to air transport and a good road system. She added the report said such a village would need about 20,000 acres, and she said Caledon could never handle something like that.

'It's not something I would endorse in the growth plan,' she said.

Neither Groves or Shaughnessy took kindly to Thompson's references to an election platform.

'I disagree with the Mayor's comments,' Groves declared. 'This is not about an election platform at all.'

She added he was quoted in the article as being 'very excited about this freight village coming.'

She added there was a lot of anxiety created in Bolton, as some residents feared that was where the freight village was slated to go. They believe that type of development should not be going there.

Shaughnessy wasn't pleased either.

'The Mayor specifically said Caledon was going to have 'a freight village - the first in the GTA,' she said in a statement released

Tuesday. ?If he thinks residents are good with predetermining a planning matter without reports to council or public meetings, then it is an issue.?

?My job as councillor is to bring forward residents' concerns and get answers,? she added. ?The Mayor is promoting civility, yet he attacks councillors who are doing their job.?