

Community Hubs Make Communities Hum

by SHERALYN ROMAN

The Town of Caledon is currently exploring uses for the Old Bolton Fire Station located in the downtown core on Ann Street. Of the many possibilities residents are being asked to weigh in on is the creation of a space that would act as a community hub of sorts; a building that provides opportunities for residents to gather, work, learn and play. This is a good thing in so many ways because a having a community gathering place, centrally located, is just one of the ways to help make a community ? well - a community.

Community is variously described as, ?a feeling that members have of belonging,? and where ?neighbours take pride in their living environment, respecting and supporting one another regardless of age, gender, race, or creed.? It's also considered to be a place that promotes a cohesive, safe and shared sense of space. Within community, the values most people actively seek out are: the safety of all, educational opportunities, economic health and/or advantages, including a chance to work, as well as health and wellness opportunities and a sense of belonging.

In other words, we all have a role to play in the fostering and development of our sense of community and using something like the Old Bolton Fire Station to create a central hub, to be used as a community meeting place for multi-purpose use, is a timely and necessary addition to our downtown core. It's an opportunity for a citizen-led design initiative where we can all have input on the kind of space we feel the Caledon community needs most.

Whether you are a small business owner, a senior, a young adult, a budding entrepreneur or a parent with small children, no doubt you have something to say about what you would like to see taken into consideration when it comes to the redesign of this piece of long-standing community architecture. The downtown core is ready for revitalization ? in fact ? it's already begun with some of the areas historic buildings having already undergone beautiful renovations including Innovations The Salon and The Wine Spot. The Bake Shoppe and the many businesses located within and around the Courtyards area are also prime, central locations for everything a Caledon resident might need including; unique shopping experiences, access to social services and to fine dining. What else would make this area a ?destination location? for you and/or your family? Now is your chance to have your say.

If, for example, you are the entrepreneur mentioned above ? would a central spot for you to meet with other like-minded entrepreneurs to share ideas and strategies make sense? From personal experience, I can tell you that the energy, the ideas, the access to technology and the day to day business tools provided by such a centre offers fertile ground for new business start-ups. Here you can make valuable connections, access tools and resources you may not otherwise be able to afford, and tap into the expertise of others as you launch your business idea. In other words, a technology and innovation hub with computer charging stations, ?flex time? working spaces, small meeting rooms and easy access to technology might be just what you need.

Seniors and/or young adults may be drawn to the downtown core for different reasons. Perhaps something that offers them a safe space to gather, to attend an adult education class or training initiative, a computer class, or to learn how to make use of video and audio recording technology. Young children interested in 3D technology or teens interested in gaming may all benefit from a central hub that offers free and interactive access to such technological resources. Sometimes referred to as a ?maker-space,? for a Town of our current and projected future size ? such a hub would make good sense and would certainly help to ?foster community.?

Having this renovated building potentially serve as an indoor/outdoor year-round farmers market (as has also been suggested) is another excellent opportunity to bring families and shoppers to the downtown core. Having a reason to come all year long to source fresh foods, engage with artisans and crafters and then partake of a coffee or treat from any one of several downtown businesses, promotes a win-win scenario for vendors and families alike, all while fostering a community based, family and environmentally friendly central hub.

Together, any one of these ideas would help to encourage a strong sense of community. It's likely that each of you have many more thoughtful and engaging ideas. We all play an important role in fostering a strong sense of community and belonging amongst our

fellow Caledon residents and your suggestions for the revitalization of the Old Bolton Fire Hall are important.

Together let's create the ideal community focussed building that helps ALL Caledon residents to prosper and succeed. Have your say in helping to create a space that offers Caledon residents everything that the dictionary says truly defines community: safety for all, educational opportunities, economic health and advantages, free work spaces and entrepreneurial hubs as well as health and wellness opportunities like weekly fresh farmers markets all year long.

To find out more visit haveyoursaycaledon.ca/ to contribute your thoughts on this and other topics of community interest.