

Concerns over plan to control weekend traffic in Belfountain

By Bill Rea

It won't be long before the leaves turn and the spectacular fall colours draw visitors to Caledon.

Belfountain always attracts a lot of these tourists, and it's expected it will again this year, provided these people get past the police. Councillor Barb Shaughnessy announced earlier this week that the traffic divisions for the Town and Peel Region have proposed to discourage traffic heading into Belfountain from the east (Forks of the Credit Road) the weekend of Oct 1 and 2, as well as Thanksgiving weekend (Oct. 8, 9 and 10).

The plan is to have police officers on duty to direct westbound traffic north on Mississauga Road. People wishing to go into Belfountain will be able to. They will just have to tell the officer.

Caledon's General Manager of Finance and Infrastructure Services Fuwing Wong said the project was approved by the West Caledon Visitor Traffic Management Committee, which includes representation from the Town, Peel Region, Caledon OPP, Credit Valley Conservation and the Ontario Heritage Trust.

The justification behind this involves traffic congestion and safety, but it's got some backs up in the Belfountain business community.

Garth Turner, owner of Belfountain General Store, is concerned it's going to impact on business in the area, especially over Thanksgiving, which is one of the busiest times of the year for their business, as well as the last holiday weekend before the snow flies.

"Businesses are likely to be pretty significantly impacted by this, and no one was consulted," he said, calling it a "tough pill to swallow."

He pointed out he employs 19 people from the area, meaning 19 local families are going to be impacted.

"I think that's a pretty draconian approach," he remarked.

But Shaughnessy said they are trying to find a way to solve the traffic situation in Belfountain.

This has been going on for some years, she added.

Shaughnessy said CVC was working on it before she got on council two years ago. There were meetings being held which she started attending. She commented that early in the summer of 2015, they got the idea to address the tourism situation in the west part of town, including Terra Cotta, Cheltenham, Alton, etc., and a traffic management committee started looking at a more holistic approach.

"It's now become a big tourism problem, rather than just a CVC issue," she remarked.

Shaughnessy also pointed out there were more than 6,000 vehicles passing through Belfountain last Thanksgiving weekend. She said there have been other methods tried to control the numbers. "A sign was installed at the side of Highway 10, near the intersection with Forks of the Credit Road, warning people how long it would take to get to Belfountain. Shaughnessy said the hope was if traffic volumes made the trip seem too long, people might not bother. The problem was the sign said 12 to 15 minutes during periods when Shaughnessy knew from experience it was more like 30 to 40 minutes.

"Obviously, something wasn't working," she said.

Shaughnessy said she was told by Wong that a strategy to encourage traffic to bypass the hamlet by going north might be workable, adding she learned Friday afternoon they were planning to go ahead with it.

"To sit back and do nothing is not a good decision," she observed. "We'd have to try something."

She also stressed the desire to see tourism succeed, but added that has to be balanced against the needs of residents and safety issues. Shaughnessy pointed out a fire truck or other emergency vehicle would have trouble getting to the scene in the event of an accident on Forks of the Credit.

But Turner called it a "clumsy, awkward, unnecessary solution."

He said he spoke to representatives of the Belfountain Community Organization, and they didn't know anything about it.

Turner also wondered how beneficial it would be to have police stopping people heading into Belfountain and asking them where they're going.

"It's not exactly a great family experience," he remarked. "Are these people going to come back to Belfountain after the police have turned them away?"

Councillor Doug Beffort agreed something needs to be done, adding he understood this was seen as an interim solution.

"We've been working really hard to find a solution to the traffic going through Belfountain at peak hours," he remarked.

He also noted the road won't be closed, but monitored by OPP. He also wondered how many people would insist on passing through

to the village with police there.