

Council not ready to drop work on Heather Glen proposal

By Bill Rea

Policies are needed in Caledon to support it being an age-friendly community.

Councillor Barb Shaughnessy recently brought the issue up, expressing the belief that the Town should be following a holistic approach. That meant, as far as she was concerned, that Town staff should not work on a proposed seniors'-style development near Caledon village.

The motion from Shaughnessy called for policies in the Town's Official Plan to support an age-friendly community, based on in-depth analysis and consultation with stakeholders. She eventually withdrew the motion after her colleagues approved an amendment from Councillor Doug Beffort, calling for the provisions regarding the development proposed by Heather Glen Seniors Village be voted upon as a separate item.

'It's been gutted,' Shaughnessy said.

The motion also called for having all community initiatives for an age-friendly community directed to Town planners as part of the Official Plan review.

Heather Glen Seniors Village has shown interest in developing some 200 acres just north of Caledon village, and made a presentation of the proposal at an information session in March.

Shaughnessy's motion called on staff to halt their involvement in this proposal, focusing their resources to work on policies and incentives to ensure seniors' housing is developed.

Shaughnessy commented that the baby boomers, who are nearing retirement, are a one-time phenomenon.

'Do we build huge institutions and create white elephants?' she asked, as she called for a holistic approach on the issue.

'Boomers have thrown a wrench into the developer's retirement marketing plan, no surprise, as these were our hippies of the past,' she observed. 'The boomers have said 'no' to senior ghettos, cookie-cutter retirement communities and condominiums of days past.'

Shaughnessy said some 47 per cent of boomers plan to age in place in their home, adding if they plan to move, they will want a neighbourhood with diversity and consideration for the environment.

She also said the Heather Glen lands are mostly marsh, and not within the settlement area boundaries. As well, she said Peel Region has determined there isn't enough water to support the 3,000 residents being envisioned.

Shaughnessy also wondered why there would be any support for a proposal like this, without studies or reports to justify it.

'The model of old is old,' she said, adding the boomers want to be more individualistic.

The policies for the age-friendly community drew support from around the council table, but Shaughnessy had trouble finding colleagues who agreed with her on her Heather Glen position.

Beffort asked for that paragraph to be taken out of the motion so it could be voted on separately, but Shaughnessy resisted.

Beffort pointed out the idea was put before the Town's Seniors' Advisory Committee, where it drew a lot of support. He added he's discussed it with people in Caledon village and not encountered much opposition.

Beffort also pointed out the lands being eyed are agricultural, with wetlands and parts of the provincial Greenbelt, which couldn't be built on, so council has asked staff to monitor the situation.

'I don't think we can stop a concept,' he added.

Director of Development Approval and Planning Policy Mary Hall told Councillor Jennifer Innis staff had attended some meetings on the proposal, adding there have been other meetings involving the Region and Province. She added staff was not lobbying on behalf of the developer.

Shaughnessy commented that planning staff had helped her write her motion and supported her position. Hall said staff might have helped with the wording, since they knew what Shaughnessy was trying to accomplish. But she said that didn't necessarily mean support.

She withdrew the motion as soon as Beffort's amendment to separate the Heather Glen provisions had passed.