

Council stresses intensification doesn't mean density

By Bill Rea

Intensification does not mean excessive densities.

That point was made repeatedly by Caledon councillors Tuesday as they were updated on the Town's intensification strategy. They want to make sure the public understands too

"We're talking about densities in keeping with the communities," was the way Mayor Marolyn Morrison summed up the discussion.

The update on the Town's intensification strategy came from Michael Hannay and Blair Scorgie of MBTW Consultants.

Scorgie told councillors the development of the strategy is in the second of four phases. He explained the purpose of the study is to examine intensification opportunities within settlement areas of town, distinguishing between built-up and greenfield areas within rural service centres, villages and hamlets. The aim is to add 1,500 dwelling units by 2031 and another 1,500 by 2041.

He added this is a holistic, town-wide strategy.

The first phase dealt with reviewing background information, such as the Greenbelt Plan, Places to Grow legislation, regional and municipal Official Plans, zoning bylaws, etc. It also identified policies and regulations, along with character-defining elements.

There has also been a review and assessment of relevant development applications, as well as identifying potential issues and constraints.

Scorgie said the strategy is addressing two land categories. One is known as "as of right," referring to undeveloped lands within settlement areas that have development potential, and underutilized lands. The other refers to speculative lands within settlement areas that have additional development or redevelopment potential. He added the speculative lands are divided into sub-categories, according to development potential of sites, and policy factors, such as special policy areas, Niagara Escarpment, oak Ridges Moraine, etc.

He said there will be a "public visioning session" to involve the community in the study process. The aim will be to build a vision for intensification and infilling. Scorgie said no date has been set for the session, but will likely be some time in February. The hope from that session, he added, will be to get an understanding of what options residents want to see.

Councillor Richard Whitehead stressed the need to make the public aware that intensification does not automatically mean radically higher densities. He said that has to be explained to people.

"It sounds like a challenge to do that," he observed, pointing out that 1,500 dwellings by 2031 will add up to roughly 5,000 people.

Hannay said the study has included coming up with a data base that looks at the available lands to determine physical limits to intensification. "It's not a blank slate," he remarked, adding there are finite boundaries and limitations.

Councillor Patti Foley was told by Hannay the development of seniors' housing has been factored in. She observed it's a type of housing the Town is short on.

Councillor Rob Mezzapelli observed that intensification can be seen as an opportunity for something revitalizing.

Hannay told him they have been working with density limits that are already allowed. For speculative lands, he said they have been looking at what's on adjoining properties.

"We're always very conservative," he said, adding they base numbers on what's the norm for the area.

Mezzapelli was glad to see the chance for seniors' housing. "It has the potential to be a real win-win situation," he said.