

Council unanimously backs Canadian Tire proposal

By Bill Rea

The Canadian Tire proposal for Bolton's industrial area is a go, as far as Caledon council is concerned.

Council Tuesday night unanimously endorsed a staff recommendation to support the rezoning and Official Plan amendment application. This came after a session that lasted almost four hours, in which there were 15 delegations from the public, and 14 of those people were against the proposal. The only supporter was Centreville Creek Road resident Carman Piercey, who pointed out the agricultural land in the area is already owned by speculators, so it's due to be developed any way. He also said he had been to previous meetings on this issue, and the comments were repetitive. 'We're hearing the same people every time,' he said.

Canadian Tire is planning to place a large distribution centre and office facility on about 180 acres at the northwest corner of Coleraine Drive and Healey Road in Bolton.

There were a couple of heated moments too.

Bolton resident Gerald Barnes suggested that warehouse positions are bottom-level jobs, so the people working in this new facility would likely not be able to afford to live in Bolton.

'We are the electorate and you are supposed to represent us,' he declared, adding that no one at last month's public information meeting on the matter spoke in favour of the development.

Councillor Allan Thompson was quick to react, telling Barnes he has constituents who work at one of the Canadian Tire depots in Brampton who make comfortable livings and contribute to the community.

'They feel insulted when this comment comes up,' he angrily shot back.

Council also heard from Kathleen Freeman, real estate manager with Canadian Tire Real Estate, who tried to calm some of the public concerns about the proposal.

She addressed the issue of people who work for Canadian Tire.

'We are a very loyal, long-standing workforce,' she declared.

One of the points of concern throughout the discussions on the proposal is the amount of truck traffic it would generate. The figure of 800 truck trips per day has been frequently mentioned, but Freeman said the new facility will be designed based on growth projections, adding it will be an average of just 350 truck trips per day. She added if things grow far beyond that, the company would look for alternatives, including seeking another facility to handle the overflow.

She also commented on the truck fleet used by Canadian Tire, commenting it rates between 95 and 98 per cent compliance with 2010 emission standards. Freeman added the company replaces trucks in the fleet roughly every five years.

She also said she understood the Town was working on bringing in regulations governing truck idling. 'We are happy to comply with that,' she said.

Some of the trucks used by the company belong to third-party operators. Freeman said they still try to maintain control over them. Most of these trucks have to deliver to more than one store per trip, so the routes are usually planned in advance. The drivers have to work with them. If drivers are not meeting standards, it's up to the company to address that, she said.

Many of the people making delegations had spoken at previous meetings.

Bolton resident Joe Grogan has been a vocal opponent of the proposal from the start. He raised the issue of the number of trucks, stating it will add to the congestion that already exists on Highway 50 to the south. He charged this will be a threat to public safety.

Grogan also suggested this could lead to an intermodal train facility in Bolton, adding there will be pressure to have a spur line installed to service the site.

Freeman had said at a previous meeting there were no such plans and she reiterated that Tuesday night, but Grogan was not convinced, calling such a line a 'definite possibility.'

Grogan also said he feared all the trucks passing in and out, with the pollution they would cause, as well as the possibility of accidents between trucks and trains.

As well, he said he feared for the quality of life in Bolton.

'In reality, Bolton will become a truck stop,' he said. 'Such will be the cost of progress.'

Grogan has also expressed concerns about the diesel emissions from all the trucks, citing information from the World Health Organization (WHO) that they cause cancer.

Former Caledon councillor Annette Groves also raised the cancer concerns. She was worried about fine particulate matter that could get deep into people's lungs, causing plenty of problems, especially for children and the elderly. She said the number of trucks expected could pose a risk to health.

'This proposal has no positive benefits for our community,' she declared, wondering why the company couldn't have chosen another place for their depot. She cited Vaughan as a more suitable location, since the extension on Highway 427 is in the works. Groves said that would mean trucks wouldn't have to pass through local neighbourhoods.

Groves also wondered why the company needs so much space. She pointed out the facility it's replacing in Brampton is only about 81 acres, and she said that made her wonder what the long-term plans really are.

Bolton resident Kevin Junor was concerned about the quality of life he moved to Bolton for, especially after he had researched the community about nine years ago.

He also pointed out this issue has got many in the community involved.

'The community is saying, 'We really don't want this,' he said.

Local resident Sandra Forester complained that Bolton is not properly represented on council, with 50 per cent of the population, but only 20 per cent of the vote.

She also pointed out this development is slated to go some 600 metres from a school, stating 'it's absolutely disgraceful' to put people's health at such risk.

She also objected to using farmland for this development.

'Easy tax revenue will not offset the long-term negative effects on Bolton and the surrounding area of Caledon,' she said.

Local resident Monty Wilson pointed out only opponents of the proposal have been speaking at meetings, although he had been hearing that there are people in favour of it. He expressed the hope that 'these phantom supporters will make themselves known tonight.'

Area resident Malcolm Campbell pointed out the Town has job density targets, and he said this development will do little to help reach them.

Healey Road resident Joseph Agius voiced his opposition.

He also recalled many years ago how residents banded together to block a slaughter house from going into the industrial area. Agius argued this depot could become what Bolton is eventually known for.

'I hope you will be proud of that legacy,' he told the councillors.

Area resident Bryan Martin recalled residents banding together about 20 years ago to oppose a massive garbage dump going in and taking out agricultural land.

'Soil is not a renewable resource,' he told the councillors. 'Be the green council that we elected.'

Barnes was another who raised the health concerns, stating residents were not getting clear answers about the capacity of the depot or the number of trucks. He also cited statements from the Environmental Protection Agency that said people most at risk are those living near busy roads, construction sites and transportation depots.

Bolton resident Sherry Brioschi said she was in favour of the proposed development coming to Caledon, 'but not there.'

'It seems council is ignoring the voice of the people,' observed Bolton resident Peter Toenz. 'This development is not good for us.'

He also feared that development will spring up around 'this monstrous Canadian Tire plant,' leaving a toxic town centre.

He also sarcastically thanked the company 'for selfishly only looking at your bottom line.'

Bolton resident Teresa Prior was another who expressed concerns about the health impacts from diesel emissions.

Dr. David Mowat, Peel Region's medical officer of health, agreed it can be a hazard.

'It's very small, but present,' he said.

Addressing some of the concerns that were raised, Mary Hall, director of development approval and planning policy for the Town, commented on the need to put growth in Bolton. Apart from intensification, the best way to do that is to take surrounding land, meaning agricultural land.

Several of the councillors observed this was a difficult decision.

Councillor Richard Paterak said the Town is forced to accept a larger population, meaning it needs more industrial and commercial assessment to balance the tax burden.

He added he was pleased that one large company wants to come in, as opposed to a lot of small ones.

He also said he's heard a lot of positive comments from people in the community reacting to the proposal, suggesting that some of the proponents feel intimidated to speak out.

Councillor Richard Whitehead pointed out the lands in question were set aside for industrial use about six years ago, and Canadian Tire was the first company to apply to occupy it. But he countered suggestions that this was going to create a precedent, arguing there are already a number of warehouse and depot operations elsewhere in the industrial area.

He agreed there are residential areas nearby to the north of the site, but there are other industrial operations between them, such as

the ones on Manchester Court.

Whitehead also pointed to the Canadian Pacific Rail line running through Bolton, observing it's a main line between the Greater Toronto Area and western Canada. About 30 trains pass through the village per day, and he said the diesel power to drive one of them is roughly the equivalent of 30 trucks, meaning the equivalent of about 900 trucks goes through Bolton daily.

He also responded to suggestions that Bolton is under-represented on council. Bolton is mostly Ward 5, but his Ward 4 is where the development is slated to go.

Whitehead also pointed out this development will bring in about \$4.7 million in property taxes annually, as well as about 1,200 jobs to the area and generate about \$20 million in development charges.

Councillor Nick deBoer commented that Canadian Tire is a reputable company, and is going to work hard to maintain that reputation.

?Having one large, good Canadian corporation will attract others,? he said.

?I think we're lucky to get a business like Canadian Tire,? Thompson added.

Councillor Doug Beffort agreed that a lot of people he's spoken to in the community want the development to go through. He agreed the decision would make some people angry, as he likened his job to dancing in a crowded night club.

?No matter what you do, you're going to rub somebody the wrong way,? he observed.

Councillor Gord McClure said a lot of his Ward 2 constituents want it too.

?I don't think we can afford to walk away from this economic opportunity,? he commented.

Councillor Rob Mezzapelli observed that the lands were set aside for industrial development about four years ago. If people had problems with a development like this, that would have been time to speak out.

?I spent hours and hours and hours on this file,? Councillor Patti Foley commented.

Among the points she made was the fact that Canadian Tire has won awards for its environmental initiatives. She also suggested that many of the opponents to the proposal are frightened by its size. but she pointed out if it were not for this proposal, the lands might be taken up by a lot of smaller operations with more trucks and more infrastructure costs.

?So maybe big is not so bad,? she observed.