

Councillors asked to ponder vision for growth in Caledon

By Bill Rea

Growth is a reality in Caledon, and it's going to have to be dealt with.

Town councillors were updated on what's going on recently, and asked to give thought to what they want to see in Caledon's future, through a series of council workshops.

Addressing an intensification strategy for the Town, Blair Scorgie of MBTW Group updated councillors on a study being conducted to identify potential areas and site for future development, redevelopment and infill, while looking at all intensification opportunities in built-up areas of town. It will also examine infrastructure needs in these possible locations and work out ways to communicate a clear vision through a comprehensive public process. They are also looking at methods to monitor and measure intensification as it occurs. Scorgie also said they are looking at two planning horizons; the present to 2031, and from 2031 to 2041.

Establishing a methodology for intensification in Caledon will involve a number of steps, including reviewing and assessing background information. That will include planning documents like the Town's Official Plan and zoning bylaws, as well as Provincial documents, like the Greenbelt Plan.

Scorgie said they will be working to come up with an inventory of undeveloped or under-used lands, including those that are unused or used for agriculture, properties without buildings, lands that have development potential, etc. Under utilized sites will include ones in established built-up areas, or places with additional development or redevelopment potential.

The study will identify lands with policies or regulations that would permit intensification, based on things like zoning and Official Plan designations.

Character defining design elements will be looked at as part of the study.

Michael Hannay of MBTW stressed that public consultation in this is important, as they will go through exercises to try determine what the municipality can accommodate. He said it will be "very much a community-based decision."

"It's not something you can legalistically force down someone's throat," he told Councillor Doug Beffort.

Other steps will involve mapping the findings of the study, including vacant lands; and identifying certain design elements and collaborating with stakeholders, including those involved with the Bolton floodplain and special policy area (SPA); identifying potential issues and constraints; and facilitating public consultation sessions.

Councillor Patti Foley urged him to make sure they work with the ward councillors, since they have a grasp on what's going on locally. Hannay agreed the public consultation process will be a good time to get them involved.

Councillor Richard Paterak pointed out the Province's Places to Grow document calls for intensification, while the Greenbelt Plan calls for the protection of lands. Since this is to be a town-wide study, he said it should look at infilling as well as intensification. He also said he didn't see any mention of cultural heritage. Since streetscapes are part of the study, he stressed the need to understand what can and can't be entertained.

Hannay agreed there are contradictions in this.

"That's the hard part," he said, pointing to the need to meet the goals of both the Province and community.

Councillor Allan Thompson pointed to the need of looking at uses surrounding residential lands. He pointed to the recently approved Canadian Tire development in Bolton, commenting the warehouse component fits in well there, but it wouldn't be as good if there was residential backing onto it. He added there would be employment development that would be a lot more compatible with residential.

Hannay commented that intensification often leads to mixed uses.

Councillor Gord McClure wondered about the cost of servicing new development. Hannay agreed that's a very important consideration, adding a lot will depend on where servicing is available. He added they are not looking at plans to provide new servicing.

Councillor Rob Mezzapelli stressed the importance that the strategy be palatable, as well as reflective of the community, adding members of the local historical society have to be part of the discussion too.

He was also concerned about the contradictions in various regulations. Citing Bolton, he said Provincial policy calls for intensification before spreading areas out, while the Bolton SPA calls for no intensification in the floodplain.

"Which policy trumps?" he asked.

He also said the rate of growth has to be considered, pointing out that can change a community more than housing styles.

Councillor Richard Whitehead said a problem is the only people who will get involved in this process will be aspiring developers who want to get their plans moving, and people who want no growth at all.

He also stressed the need for councillors to be involved, but not wait for the public process.

"I think you're better to include us at the front end," he said.

Jamie Cook, of Watson and Associates, commented on the main drivers of growth in Caledon.

He said they include Caledon's proximity to the largest and most diverse employment market in Canada; diminishing urban land supply in both Mississauga and Brampton; and available "whitebelt" lands in Caledon. He said that amounts to about 10,500 hectares, or roughly six times the size of the Bolton Settlement area. Another growth pressure he mentioned is the existing infrastructure that can be accessed from Caledon, including Highways 410, 427 and 407, as well as Pearson International Airport, intermodal terminals and post-secondary schools. He also pointed to proposed infrastructure, like the east-west transportation corridor that's being studied in town, the high 427 extension and possible GO train service.

Cook said it boils down to Caledon being marketable.

Addressing the "whitebelt," Cook said to expect that about 54 per cent of those lands would be used for residential development, while the remaining 46 per cent would be employment. He also said preliminary estimates indicate the area will be able to handle about 357,000 people and 150,000 jobs, although he said that would be over the very long term. He did point out that as the supply of employment land diminishes in Brampton and Mississauga, there will be calls for more growth in Caledon.

Cook also cited preliminary numbers to predict that about six per cent of the "whitebelt" in Caledon will be developed by 2031, and another 21 per cent between 2031 and 2041. He said the remaining 73 per cent would see development after 2041.

In coming up with a vision for the Town, the growth projections will also have to consider such things as impacts on transportation, water and waste water services, financial and economic effects and community form, character and connectivity.

"This will be a high-level review," he said.

Whitehead brought up the issue of densities, pointing out the Town has had to work with Provincial policies to make things work for them. He said there has to be something that works for Caledon.

Thompson pointed to the need for bigger parks and amenities.

He also wasn't pleased with the projections of 54 per cent residential land, calling for more lands for employment. He pointed out 80 per cent of Caledon is not going to change, so the development that does come in has to be sustainable.

McClure wondered about the impact on farming in the "whitebelt," pointing out it's getting harder just to take a wagon load of hay along the road, and he said the east-west corridor will make things worse.

"It's not a farming community any more," he declared.

Mezzapelli had some problems with projections of growth on the "whitebelt," commenting as available land is used up in Brampton and Mississauga, the pace will increase.

"That is extremely concerning," he said. "Accelerated growth is not good planning policy."

He also commented on the need to tell Peel Region and the Province what kind of growth can be accepted in Caledon, and not what they want to stuff in.

Mezzapelli was also concerned about the amount of prime agricultural land that could be developed. He said farming is a key component to the community, adding his vision for the "whitebelt" includes having some of stay in agriculture.

"I see Caledon as being the lungs and the liver of the GTA," he said.