

Councillors note public resentment over Region's position on BRES

By Bill Rea

Public interest in the progress of the Bolton Residential Expansion Study (BRES) is running high, based on the turnout at last Wednesday's open house.

Peel Regional staff estimated about 175 people went through the open house, which lasted about four hours. It dealt with information about the six options for expansion of Bolton, with a focus on the option picked by Regional council in June, and which is the subject of a proposed Regional Official Plan Amendment (ROPA) application.

There were six main options as to where the residential expansion should go, as well as some additional rounding out areas.

The Town had previously chosen Option 3, also known as the Go Station Focus option, which involves lands on Humber Station Road, between the Canadian Pacific Railway tracks and The Gore Road, north of King Street.

Regional staff in June had recommended a hybrid of Options 4 and 5, an 'L' shaped parcel of land that straddles Humber Station and runs west to The Gore Road, south of King. But Regional councillors overruled their advice and opted for Option 6. Option 6 involves lands that run along the east side of Humber Station between Healey and Mayfield Roads, as well as a small triangular piece of land at the southeast corner of the site. The justification was it was cheaper and made better use of infrastructure already in place. The plan behind BRES is to have 10,300 more people living in Bolton by 2031 and another 2,500 jobs, and that will require adding about 183 hectares to the settlement area.

Town councillors who were on hand seemed pleased with the turnout. Although there were many representatives from the development industry, they also reported talking to a good number of concerned or interested residents.

Mayor Allan Thompson was encouraged to see a lot of residents were submitting written comments, pointing out they will eventually be submitted to the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB), which will probably make the final decision on the issue.

He also expressed satisfaction that so many members of the public were on hand.

'I thought there'd be more from the development industry here tonight,' he said. 'I spoke mostly to residents.'

'I'm encouraged to see the public has come out,' Councillor Rob Mezzapelli remarked toward the end of the meeting. He added he had noticed some developers were on hand as well, 'but I also got a good sense that the general public was here.'

Mezzapelli said that people recognized the importance of the economic factors involving the servicing costs, but added they realize that's not the only factor. He pointed out two different consultants had reached similar conclusions, giving more credence to Option 3.

Mezzapelli also said he detected some resentment on the part of residents that the Region went against the wishes of the Town.

'I think people are surprised to see the disconnect between what the studies have supported and the draft ROPA before us,' he commented.

Councillor Jennifer Innis said she also noticed some resentment on behalf of the public.

'They feel as though it's already a done deal and Regional council has made up its mind without hearing their comments,' she said.

Innis also said people think there's not enough attention being paid to creating a healthy community, or to connecting the ROPA to the rest of Bolton.

'The residents are disappointed,' she observed. 'They feel that their comments aren't important enough.'

Councillor Nick deBoer said people in his ward still want to see Option 3.

'They're questioning some of the information,' he commented.

In terms of the mood of the public over what the Region has done, deBoer wasn't sure 'resentment' was the right word.

'There's a lot of questioning over why,' he observed.

Councillor Barb Shaughnessy said a number of people indicated they hadn't realized how much work had gone into the process.

'I think it's almost overwhelming to some people,' she commented.