

# Councillors offer initial thoughts on legal cannabis stores in Caledon

By **ZACHARY ROMAN**

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

In October 2023, Caledon Council approved a motion from Ward 3 Councillor Doug Maskell which asked Town of Caledon staff to review the feasibility of permitting cannabis retail stores within the Town of Caledon and report back in the first quarter of 2024.

On Wednesday, as the Citizen went to press, the Town of Caledon was set to hold an open house where residents could share their opinions on the possibility of having legal cannabis stores in town.

Ahead of the open house, the Citizen reached out to Caledon Councillors for their views.

Regional Councillor Mario Russo said he hopes the debate in Caledon will not come down to whether one agrees on the use of cannabis or not.

"A federal decision was made years ago and the use of cannabis is now totally legal. The debate and concerns should be focused on land use planning," said Russo.

He said the novelty of the initial cannabis debate didn't allow for proper analysis on land use planning items like parking rates, separation distances, and interaction in established communities. Russo said now that time has passed, evidence and data exists from other municipalities that can be referenced and used to make better policies in Caledon.

"If these items are addressed, then I see the cannabis business as no different than any other business asking for permissions to operate in Caledon," said Russo.

Ward 2 Councillor Dave Sheen said every week he's shocked to hear from Caledon OPP about the number of impaired drivers on Caledon roadways.

"Before I could support a move to bring cannabis stores to Caledon, I would need some assurance, supported by proper studies and/or research, that doing so is unlikely to add to the number of impaired drivers on Caledon roadways," said Sheen.

Ward 5 Councillor Tony Rosa said while he's not ready to make a decision yet, he's going to keep an open mind on the prospect of legal cannabis stores and talk to residents in his ward about it.

"I need to gather as much information as possible in order to make the best-informed decision," said Rosa.

He said some municipalities have legal cannabis stores under control and that it will be important to look at data from other municipalities similar in size to Caledon.

Maskell said allowing legal cannabis stores could be a great opportunity for Caledon. He said if they're allowed, that business will generate tax revenue for the Town and provide employment opportunities. He said currently people are taking their money elsewhere or turning to the black market, which doesn't benefit Caledon.

Maskell said Caledon should look at best practices from other municipalities and that it will be important to not end up like some municipalities which have too many stores all in one area.

"We'll see what people have to say and we'll see what Council has to say, but it was time to revisit it for sure," said Maskell. "I think

we can come up with an appropriate and valid 'made in Caledon' solution for this.?