

Golf course proposal progresses over objections

By Bill Rea

Caledon council Tuesday approved an Official Plan amendment that will facilitate the development of the golf course proposed by Kaneff Properties Limited near Inglewood, but there are a lot more hurdles to be cleared before anyone tees off.

There is still considerable opposition to the proposal and even the motion that was passed by council failed to get unanimous support. Councillors Patti Foley and Rob Mezzapelli voted against it.

Town staff had recommended the application be refused, citing minimum distance separation (MDS) from active farm operations as a main concern. The lengthy motion that was passed called for, among other things, that the Province consider the Town's position on MDS as part of the next five-year review of the Provincial Policy Statement (PPS).

The proposal involves some 300 acres around the northeast corner of Olde Base Line Road and Highway 10. Town planners reported it involves an 18-hole golf course, along with accessory uses and a hotel.

A rezoning is also being sought, but planners stressed they were only dealing with the Official Plan amendment application in their report. They also stated the application complied with the applicable policies, except for the MDS provisions, which was why they recommended refusal.

They also reported the rezoning is to be addressed in the next step at the request of the applicants to allow for the drafting of a development agreement.

Planners stated Kaneff was required to do MDS calculations for the new development being proposed. Their consultant (Stantec Consulting Ltd.) did an agricultural impact assessment and determined there were four arcs impacting on the subject lands. That assessment was peer reviewed by Colville Consulting Inc., and there were some concerns raised as a result. The Stantec report was also reviewed by the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) and they agreed the arcs were not as big as they should have been.

The planning report stated the proposed hotel would be outside the MDS arcs, while some of the golf facilities, including greens, tees, maintenance buildings, parking lots and a practice range would be impacted.

There were also questions raised as to whether a golf course is a high intensive recreational use.

Glen Broll of Glen Schnarr and Associates, representing Kaneff, commented compliance issues with MDS really amounted to differences of opinion. He added if there are four or more non-agricultural uses within an arc, then MDS doesn't apply.

He also wondered if a golf course is a high intensity use. He pointed out there are walking areas like the Bruce Trail passing through arcs, and they are deemed low intensity. He said they believe a golf course is too.

Councillor Doug Beffort pointed out MDS could impact on neighbouring farmers who would want to expand their operations. Broll said Kaneff would be willing to go along with such expansions. "If it's a two-way protection, absolutely," he declared.

Local resident Barb Shaughnessy repeated her opposition to the proposal, pointing to the loss of farmland and the burden it would place on neighbouring farmers.

She said she understood a focus of the town is on tourism. She said people come to the area, intrigued to see sites of farms, and not to see golf courses.

Tim Forster called the staff recommendations basic and straightforward.

"I know you guys really want a golf course," he remarked, but pointed out the land is being actively farmed and is surrounded by three cattle operations and an equestrian facility.

"This land is special," he said, wondering why anyone would want to golf in the middle of all that agriculture. "It doesn't make sense."

He also pointed out there are already a number of golf courses in the area. "It's hard to make a case for the economic need for another golf course in Caledon," he remarked.

Former councillor Ian Sinclair brought forth a number of matters.

They included the number of concerns raised by area residents, and he said there was no indication they had been properly addressed in the planning report.

Sinclair also said the application process being followed was a "shambles."

He said the public information meeting on the matter, held in June 2011, included "two entirely different site plans."

"The applicant is a very sophisticated land developer," he maintained, and "not some kind of dilettante."

He also mentioned key natural heritage and hydrologic features in the area, commenting the report didn't show how they had been addressed.

Sinclair urged the matter be referred back to Town staff, with full Official Plan amendment and rezoning applications, along with another public information meeting.

Senior Development Planner Casey Blakely told councillors that staff took into account all the comments, including those from the peer review as well as from other agencies, when preparing the report.

The motion passed by council called on Kaneff, as part of the development agreement, to register a clause on title indicating they would not oppose expansion of the operations on any of the neighbouring farms.

It also stated that MDS should apply to facilities like hotels and club houses, but not to the other amenities of golf courses.

Beffort agreed there was still a lot of difference of opinion on this issue, adding it was impossible to please everyone on this.

“Being up here is like dancing in a crowded night club,” he observed. “No matter what you do, you're going to rub someone the wrong way.”

Councillor Richard Paterak pointed out there are still a number of steps that have to be addressed before the golf course opens. He added he has faith in the future process, and was confident that Kaneff would be held to the terms of the zoning and development agreement.

He also pointed to the need for economic activity in the countryside. “We can't do it just on farms,” he said.

He also observed that MDS represents guidelines, not laws or regulation.

“We have to recognize the differences,” he said. “To make society work, we have to have flexibility.”

Councillor Nick deBoer commented that golf courses, properly laid out, provide habitats for various species. Blakely added the development agreement will have mechanisms to make sure issues involving endangered species are addressed.

Councillor Gord McClure commented that golf courses make good neighbours for farms. “I've never had a farmer tell me different,” he said.

Mezzapelli said he was reluctant to deal with the Official Plan amendment and rezoning separately.

Mayor Marolyn Morrison said she was satisfied that staff had dealt with all the requirements except for MDS, and she added that is a matter of interpretation.

She also pointed out there are farmers on council, and they wouldn't have supported the application if they thought there would be a negative impact on agriculture.