

Groves on committee ? Region seeking lawyers to defend Bolton expansion

By Bill Rea

Peel Region will be looking for lawyers to defend its position on the expansion of Bolton, and Councillor Annette Groves will be sitting on a committee to find them.

She will be joined by Mississauga Councillor Carolyn Parrish, who put forth the motion to create the committee, and Brampton Mayor Linda Jeffrey.

There were a number of options included in the Bolton Residential Expansions Study (BRES).

The Town backed the lands known as Option 3, also known as the Go Station Focus option, involving lands on Humber Station Road, between the Canadian Pacific Railway tracks and The Gore Road, north of King Street. Regional staff had backed on hybrid of Options 4 and 5, further to the south. But Regional councillors, late last year, opted for what's known as Option 6, or the Solmar Development lands. These lands run along the east side of Humber Station Road, between Healey and Mayfield Roads. As well, there is a small triangular piece of land at the southeast corner of the site.

The necessary Regional Official Plan Amendment (ROPA) to bring in the expansion, also known as ROPA?30, has been appealed to the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB) by a number of parties, including the Town, and the motion stated it will be necessary to retain legal counsel, as well as expertise in other areas, like planning, to defend the position.

Groves' appointment to the committee was really a foregone conclusion, since Parrish's motion stated there must be a representative from each of the three municipalities, and each member had to have voted in favour of Option 6. Groves was the only Caledon rep who did.

Parrish told her colleagues this will be a ?huge? OMB hearing when it comes, attracting major legal players, who she referred to as ?Bay Street boys.?

A report from staff stated there were a couple of options available for lining up the necessary legal assistance, and Parrish said she favoured sole-sourcing based on council direction. A competitive process, which was another alternative mentioned by staff, would be ?cumbersome,? she said.

Mississauga Councillor Jim Tovey agreed the Region needs to get the best legal advice possible, as he hoped to see a ?pitbull in a courtroom.?

The staff report said there have been 14 separate appeals launched, and they said the legal costs alone would be in the range of \$300,000 to \$450,000.

?This is going to cost a lot of money,??Tovey observed, adding there will be expenses for other experts on top of that.

There were some councillors who wondered how high this should be permitted to go.

?When is too much too much?? Brampton Councillor Gael Miles asked, as she suggested a cap be put on how much is spent. She agreed with the importance of good counsel, but not at any cost.

Regional Solicitor and Director of Legal Services Patrick O'Connor told her the committee will make recommendations, and at that point they will know the hourly fees for the lawyer.

Miles wanted the committee to come back with more than one option.

Parrish warned her it will be hard for the committee to come back with the calibre of legal advice needed on this case. She also stressed the need for getting the best, arguing if the Region loses the case, it will not be money that's been well spent.

?I think we'll be lucky to find one good one,? she added.

Mississauga Councillor Ron Starr expected it will cost more than \$500,000.

Brampton Councillor Grant Gibson didn't like the idea of councillors doing this job. He argued it should be up to staff. ?Theres already been enough political interference in this whole thing,? he observed.

Miles was also not pleased with the idea of only those who supported Option 6 being allowed on the committee. She feared a ?stacked committee? might have ?carte blanche.?

?I don't know what councillors are doing on the committee in the first place,? she added, charging the motion was ?too open-ended.?

?This is too political,? she declared. ?It's all wrong.?

Brampton Councillor John Sprovieri pointed out the Option 6 landowners will be represented at the hearing, and he wondered why the Region needs to spend any money at all.

?There's a very good chance it's just going to be a waste of money,? he remarked.

?This may become a nightmare,? he added, pointing out it started with political interference and could result in a waste of money.

Sprovieri also had a problem with only Option 6 supporters being on the committee. He pointed out the vote at council was not

unanimous.

But Mississauga Councillor Pat Saito countered people who didn't support council's final position might not fight very hard for the best counsel. "It's not the time to redebate the issue," she declared.

Caledon Councillor Jennifer Innis said she's never supported a sole-source approach on any issue. "I find it odd that we would take this route," she added.

Innis said the matter should be sent back to staff because they will keep the Region's best interests in mind.