

Mayor hopefuls make their pitches in Ward 2

By Bill Rea

The people seeking to be the next mayor of Caledon got two chances last week to make their cases to the voters, and both of them were in Ward 2.

The meetings were hosted by the SouthFields Village Residents Group last Tuesday and the following evening by the Cheltenham Area Residents' Association (CARA).

Four of the five candidates running for mayor were on hand for both meetings (George Niras wasn't at either), and the hopefuls apparently brought their manners with them. There were a few pithy one-liners, but for the most part, the candidates seemed interested in building themselves up, as opposed to knocking their opponents.

Bolton resident Gary Cascone said he's lived in Caledon more than a decade and he commented on the changes that have taken place in that time, through urban sprawl, large warehouse operations being built, gridlock, etc. He stressed the need for a strategy and new leadership from people who are not career politicians.

'I'm a simple guy like you,' he told the SouthFields Village audience, as he promised he would serve a maximum of two terms as mayor. 'I don't want a career as a politician.'

Former councillor Ian Sinclair stressed his experience in Caledon for close to 40 years.

He also said he has a history of working with diverse points of view.

'I get things done,' he declared, adding he got everything done that was assigned to him as a councillor.

'I'm the experienced outsider,' he said. 'I'm very proud of Caledon's values.'

Sinclair also told the Cheltenham audience the Town had about \$25 million in the bank in 2003 when he left council.

'There's nothing left,' he said. 'It's all gone.'

'I've been asked to come back and fix it,' he added.

Councillor Allan Thompson stressed his 11 years on council.

'I think we've done a good job developing the community we're proud of,' he commented. 'I'm very proud of Caledon. I'm very proud of where I live.'

Thompson also pointed to the need for public engagement to build the community Caledon residents want.

There have been issues raised about customer service at Town Hall, but Thompson said they're working on it, and he expressed the hope that challenge can be addressed with him as mayor.

'We've some challenges and I'm looking forward to it,' he said.

Former councillor Nancy Stewart had lots of praise for the people in SouthFields Village.

'What a lovely community you have,' she declared, as she cited the events held in the area that show pride in the community.

Stewart said she has the experience to work effectively and move Caledon in the right direction, as she said an effective council requires people-to-people talk.

Voter turnout in municipal elections is usually around 35 to 40 per cent. 'That's pathetic,' she said.

But Stewart said she has yet to meet anyone in Caledon who doesn't care about the community, but there are many who don't appreciate the connection between their hopes and institutions like government.

She urged people to get to know their candidates. 'Vote for a new mayor of your choice,' she said.

Addressing Ward 2 issues, Cascone pointed to a lack of recreation facilities, suggesting those could be advanced through negotiations with developers before they get started.

Sinclair commented on the GTA West Corridor and the highway (informally known as Highway 413) that could possibly be going through the area is very important. He pointed out the studies have resulted in land along the corridor being frozen. He said there needs to be a strategic vision for the lands to the south as they become urbanized.

Thompson agreed the 413 and proposed realignment of Highway 410 are the big challenges now, considering the frozen lands.

He also pointed out the plans governing the Provincial Greenbelt, Niagara Escarpment and Oak Ridges Moraine are all up for review next year.

'We have a challenge to try and get it right,' he said.

Thompson also mentioned the recent discussions involved the Cheltenham Badlands, pointing out community engagement is being employed on that issue.

Stewart pointed out SouthFields Village is a model community, although she said it needs a community centre. She also observed there's still a lot of construction activity in the area, and there are concerns for the safety of children.

She also said seniors' housing is an on-going issue, and one that has not been handled well in Caledon.

There were public concerns expressed that there's been a lot of growth in Ward 2, and that services have not kept pace, while there are also calls to hold the line on taxes.

Stewart said holding the line on taxes requires budgets that are within the Town's means, with increases being restricted to the cost of living. She did point to the need of involving the public earlier in the budget process.

Thompson agreed with the idea of living within means, but added some of the tax hikes from the Town have been the result of Provincial downloading

Sinclair pointed out community groups have contributed a lot of facilities in some of the villages. He said the Caledon Central Pool was largely the work of local Lions, Veterans contributed to the Alton Legion and the arena in Inglewood was a village project.

Cascone said things have to be run like a business.

?You've got to be serious,? he said. ?You've got to be tough.?

?What will change if you become mayor?? one man asked all the candidates. ?I've been frustrated by the current council.?

Sinclair commented that he's watched council over the last couple of terms become more disconnected from the community. He said there have been major land-use decisions that council has presented as done deals. He called for more direct accountability.

Cascone repeated his believe that the Town needs to be run like a business, adding there might have be changes in the administration of the Town and the courage will be needed to make the necessary changes.

Thompson said the process of how things are done at the Town need to be corrected, with more community engagement.

Stewart called for meaningful tangible changes, as well as a new spirit at Town Hall.

?They work for us,? she said. ?We pay their salaries.?

Stewart also commented on the need to increase the industrial and commercial tax assessment, meaning it has to be easier to do business in Caledon.

?We've got to be open for business,? she said.

She added the area surrounding the proposed Highway 413 could be an area for corporate head offices.

Thompson said industrial-commercial made up about nine per cent of the assessment in Town when he got on council, but he said it's up to about 17.9 per cent. That's not sufficient, and more businesses need to be attracted.

Sinclair recalled when he was on council, the Town decided to ge entrepreneurial, front-ending plans for Bolton and Tullamore with infrastructure. He said the current planning approval process is driving business out of Caledon.

Sinclair also said things were more open at Town Hall when he was on council, but he added today things have to go through the mayor and CAO. He said that has to change.

Cascone said people he's been speaking to have indicated Caledon is not open for business. He called for getting down to basics, and fast-tracking minor permit applications. He cited the difficulties people can have with building permits.

?The process is ridiculous,? he said. ?We're over governed in a lot of areas.?

Thompson argued there have been changes at Town Hall, with more to come. ?There is definitely room for improvement,? he said.

One of the people at the Cheltenham meeting asked what the candidates what they would do if Santa Claus gave the Town \$500,000 to spend on Cheltenham at budget time.

Stewart said she would give it to the community, arguing if the Town tried to spend it, it would end up costing twice as much.

Sinclair said he would talk to the councillors and groups like CARA. He added he would want something done about speeding and traffic volumes, as well as creating some kind of entrance feature for the hamlet.

Thompson also said he would work with the community and council. He put sidewalks and streetscaping on the list.

?It really is your money to spend,? Cascone said.

One man, who identified himself as a new resident, was concerned about traffic safety issues, stating there didn't seem to be a lot of reason for the setting of the various speed limits on roads.

?I don't know where they get them,? Cascone said, adding the Town has to meet with people to tell them what's being planned.

Thompson said that issue is coming to council. The plan is to do a full in-house study across Caledon. He added a lot of the speed limit adjustments have ben politically driven.

Stewart agreed the speed limits are political, adding it takes pressure from the public to get them changed.

One woman in Cheltenham asked if the future of Caledon is to be urban or rural.

Stewart said the Town will never lose it's rural character if there's proper planning, but some areas have to be urbanized in planned and moderate growth.

Sinclair thought of what the citizens want, commenting it's not a lot of growth.

Thompson pointed out about 81 per cent of Caledon is not going to change because of the Niagara Escarpment, Oak Ridges Moraine and Greenbelt. The other 19 per cent is going to change over the next 100 years, and the community has the chance to get in front of that change.

Cascone pointed out people come to Caledon because it's a unique place to live. He said there will be growth, but it has to be done responsibly. He added developers have to understand what the Town wants.