

Mayor, MP & MPP answer questions in virtual town hall meeting

Written By ALYSSA PARKHILL

Back on May 8, Caledon Mayor Allan Thompson alongside Dufferin-Caledon MP Kyle Seebach and Dufferin-Caledon MPP Sylvia Jones held a virtual town hall to discuss information and access to assistance for local businesses.

Town of Caledon staff gathered questions from the public, allowing them to make submissions via email to ask the three officials on how to assist their business during these times of COVID-19.

Some business owners have reached out to ask about the qualifications for financial assistance for their businesses, including one Bolton resident who informed the Town that they don't have a mortgage on their property.

"We see the gaps and those are the types of conversations that we have with our federal counterparts to say, 'can we modify this program that residential landlords that don't have a mortgage can qualify in the days and months to come',?" said MPP Jones. "The answer right now is no you don't. But I can assure you that there are lots of conversations being had between the ministries and levels of government to see whether there are opportunities for improving the program."

The Ontario government has put together a handful of financial assistance programs to allow those eligible to apply for and receive funding towards keeping their business afloat. From tax and financial relief, to rent assistance and wage subsidy.

Q: "What is the government's plan on reengaging and rehiring employees now that they are being subsidized by CERB and CESB?"

"The whole concept of the Canada Emergency Wage subsidy is that businesses will remain in contact with their employees, so they will be able to rehire them full-time when we get to the end of COVID-19," explained Mr. Seebach. "That is one of the primary functions of the Canada wage subsidy. All these programs are going to have to be looked to be modified in such a way, so people aren't going to choose to not work because it might affect the benefits that they applied to."

"As we transition back to more work on-site, there is going to be a different reality, and some of that responsibility will end up on the employers in terms of 'what do we have to do to keep our employees, our clients and customers safe,'" commented MPP Jones.

Mr. Seebach continued to state that the government is looking to extend the wage subsidy past June 6 by one more month.

Q: "What future aid will be provided to the tourism, agriculture and agritourism industries, specifically in Caledon?"

"In terms of agriculture and food relation products, of course that is an essential business today and can operate. Even businesses that are allowed to operate as essential services and businesses, they must adhere to very strict guidelines. You see social distancing changes, you see how businesses have very astutely adapted to make sure their customers and employees are safe on the job, and work environment," answered MPP Jones. "In terms of tourism sector as a whole, there is no doubt that it is one of the most hard hit pieces, and of course in Dufferin-Caledon when many of our smaller businesses rely on that tourism component, these are important pieces that we are looking at through the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport but also with Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs."

Mr. Seebach remarked that the federal government is looking at sector to sector relief and has wholly prioritized getting funds out to individuals and businesses that are need of assistance, and informed that \$250 million has been committed to the agricultural field.

"I know hearing from farmers all across Dufferin and Caledon that things are tough right now, and there's going to need to be a much larger federal aid package for all farming sectors, across Canada, and here in Dufferin-Caledon," he explained.

Q: ?Has the town or region considered commercial tax reductions??

?When we look at our residential taxes basically a third to the school board, a third to the region and a third to the town of Caledon. The town of Caledon is the tax collector, but the very day the taxes are due the next day we have to issue the money to province to either the school board or to the region for their portion,? explained Mr. Thompson. ?The challenge we have when it comes to commercial taxes is, two thirds of it is education tax. That's the big kicker. So, if we can see a reduction or reprieve of the school board taxes, then yes that's how we can definitely help the commercial tax. We've done everything in our power that we possibly can, both at the town and the region, but our biggest issue is the school board.?

Q: ?Credit card companies are still charging high interest rates with no relief in sight, during this difficult time many of us rely on using our credit cards. What can the government do to address this problem??

?There has been legislation before Parliament several times in the last number of years to limit the amount that can be charged for interest on credit cards. Right now, what banks have committed to is to review customer situations on a case by case basis, in respect to mortgage payments and other loan products. Get in touch with your bank, let them know that your business is facing some difficulties, and you're looking for a reduction in interest for your various loan products, deferral of interest payments, try to find what options are available,? said Mr. Seeback. ?The government has been able to speak to the banks about this, without enacting any legislation, so my hope is that will continue, and no legislation would be required from the government at this time.?

To end of a positive, note each official announced their dedication and thanks to local businesses for their questions and inquiries and their continuation on working to doing right for local businesses.

?We care about our businesses, it's essential. We want to make sure that we keep our community whole as we come out of this,? said Mayor Thompson. ?The only way we're going to do that is have the open dialogue, try to find ways that we can help one another, and to do that is through collaboration between the businesses, the economic development at the Town of Caledon, the province of Ontario and the federal government.?

He added, ?we want to help, we care and the only way we can do it, is us all working together.?

For more information about the virtual town hall, or businesses assistance please visit [Caledon.ca](#).