

Mayor puts fast-tracked zoning bylaws on hold after significant public backlash

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Many Caledon residents were not happy with a recent decision, made using Strong Mayor powers, to advance zoning bylaws for 12 development applications that would bring 35,000 housing units to Caledon.

Residents made their voices and concerns heard at an April 17 citizens' forum (held by newly-formed volunteer group Democracy Caledon) and April 25 public meeting (held by the Town of Caledon) on the zoning bylaws for the 12 development applications.

The mayoral decision residents took issue with was issued by Groves on March 26.

There were around 150 people at the citizens' forum, and even more at the April 25 public meeting, which had well over 30 delegates.

Caledon's Town Hall was packed past capacity, and the meeting didn't finish until nearly 2 a.m. ? it lasted around seven hours.

Groves said there were nearly 200 people at the public meeting, while Democracy Caledon volunteer Nicola Ross said there were 350.

?The Council chamber was filled, the atrium was filled, the cafeteria was filled, the basement was filled? then they took people over to the community center which is where we asked the meeting to be held in the first place because we knew it was going to run over this space here,? said Ross in a delegation at Caledon Council's April 30 meeting at Town Hall.

Regional councillor Christina Early also estimated around 350 people were at the public meeting, and called it unprecedented.

As a result of residents' concerns, Groves removed the 12 zoning bylaws from the agenda of Council's April 30 meeting, where they could have been approved if just one-third of Caledon Councillors supported Groves' decision.

At the April 30 meeting, Groves said there were questions and concerns about the zoning bylaws that weren't addressed.

?The message was loud and clear that people in Caledon need and deserve more information, information about the process and why we are considering this action, and the details about each of the 12 parcels of land,? said Groves. ?We're scheduling three public information sessions for the next month in different areas of the town to provide more transparency and share detailed information with residents and stakeholders.?

Groves said she'll address the questions and concerns of residents, and encouraged residents to keep checking the Town of Caledon's website (caledon.ca) and social media feeds for information about the upcoming public information sessions.

?Thank you, Caledon for helping us realize we must do better,? said Groves.

Groves' decision, now on hold, was expected to expedite planning procedures by one to two years for 12 development applications which are generally in the areas of Mayfield West, Tullamore, Alloa, Wildfield and Bolton. Loopstra Nixon, an outside law firm, was used to draft the zoning bylaws for the 12 applications.

During her April 30 delegation, Ross said the minutes from the April 25 public meeting do not accurately represent the comments made by many of the delegates on April 25.

?I could not find reference to the criticism many delegates expressed? from reading the notes, the unassuming reader may understand that the delegates were in favor of the process with only minor technical comments,? said Ross, reading a letter from a delegate. ?You were there? you know it could not be further from the truth.?

Later in the Council meeting, Caledon Council unanimously voted in favour of referring the minutes from the April 25 public meeting back to Caledon's town clerk so they can be amended to more accurately represent what was said at the public meeting.

Democracy Caledon volunteer Debbe Crandall also delegated at the April 30 Council meeting.

?Zoning is not supposed to precede secondary planning, zoning is not supposed to precede detailed environmental studies, fiscal analysis, transportation planning, allocation of water and wastewater servicing, and community building,? said Crandall. ?Zoning is supposed to codify all of that work; zoning is a municipal tool to ensure that all the work is done properly and that it reflects what is truly needed to meet the affordable housing crisis with input from all of council and input from the public.?

Crandall said Democracy Caledon will be attending the three public information sessions and continuing to ask questions.

?We will continue to ask you, Mayor Groves, why you are using your Strong Mayor powers to pre-zone to allow 35,000 homes that far exceed the 2031 housing pledge,? said Crandall.

Caledon's housing pledge to the Province says Caledon will have 13,000 new housing units by 2031. Council endorsed this pledge in 2023.