

Mayoral candidates answer questions at Caledon Chamber of Commerce debate

By **Zachary Roman**

Candidates in Caledon's upcoming municipal election squared off at a spirited debate hosted by the Caledon Chamber of Commerce on October 4.

In attendance were candidates for mayor, Annette Groves and Jennifer Innis; candidates for Regional Councillor, Wards 4, 5, and 6; and candidates for Ward 4 Councillor, Ward 5 Councillor, and Ward 6 Councillor.

This article focuses on questions answered by the two mayoral candidates; however, the debate was recorded by Rogers TV and can be viewed in its entirety at the following link: youtube.com/watch?v=3ZOe5axmjtE.

Groves and Innis were asked how they plan to involve residents in the decision-making process in Caledon if elected. Groves answered first and said she won't be supporting any Ministerial Zoning Orders (MZO) as they are undemocratic.

"It excludes and circumvents the public process? we need [residents] at the table as partners," said Groves. "Public question period was removed from the agenda. If elected as Mayor, you will be able to come back to Council meetings and ask anything you wish of us as Council members."

Innis responded and said Groves did not support an MZO that could have stopped an asphalt plant from coming to Caledon. Innis said not all MZO are created equal and that there is a public planning process included as part of MZO.

"I did support an MZO for our GO Train lands and one that was against the asphalt plant? we need to use all the tools in our tool box," said Innis. She added that it's important for the Town to print and make its Council agendas available to Caledon residents sooner so they have more time to review them before meetings. Finally, she said communication between the Town and residents interested in the planning process could be improved as well.

The two candidates for Mayor were asked if they were for or against the proposed Highway 413 and to state their reasons why.

Innis responded first in support of the highway and said there's a lot of misconceptions about it; that it's not going to be going through farmland but instead through Caledon's future population growth areas.

"This is infrastructure we need to keep trucks off our local roads," said Innis. "If you're opposed to highways going through environmentally sensitive lands you should be against the 427 extension as well."

Groves spoke next and she was against the highway. She said two billion dollars of goods move through the Region of Peel each day and people don't need to wait 15 or 20 years for a highway that may never come. "We have the 407? remove tolls for trucks and get trucks moving there now," said Groves.

Traffic safety has been a hot topic as the election approaches, and the mayoral candidates were asked what they'd like to see done about speed and safety on Highway 10.

Groves said councillors have been working with the Region and Ministry of Transportation, but that the Ministry needs to step up and provide more funding for enforcement.

"Our officers are telling us there's not enough of them to go around," said Groves. "We need to prioritize spending to ensure funding for police, fire, and paramedics matches growth."

Innis said the time for discussing a bypass around Caledon Village is long overdue and that planning for it needs to be done promptly. Innis said she's lost friends on Highway 10 and that she also believes more enforcement is needed along the route.

Groves and Innis were then asked if they would drop any and all COVID-19 mandates in the Town of Caledon.

Innis said while mask mandates are no longer a part of everyday life, if she was flying on a plane for example, she'd still be wearing a mask as it's an enclosed space with poor air flow.

?We have to remember our residents with health concerns that may not be visible? if there's a time and place we need to ensure the public's safety we will continue to do that until public health gives us the green light,? said Innis.

Groves said she relies on the guidance of public health and that the topic of masks is a tough one as no matter where you side you will end up making some people unhappy. When it comes to masks, Groves said it should be each individual's choice whether they want to wear one.

After questions led by the Caledon Chamber of Commerce were complete, an open question period began for residents in attendance.

One of the first residents to speak was a man who said he makes minimum wage and was wondering why Caledon Council recently approved a 24 per cent raise for the next term of councillors when many people are struggling due to the pandemic's impact.

Groves said a 24 per cent raise for politicians is not acceptable and that's why she did not support it when it came through Council.

She added the Town needs to lead by example. Innis was in support of the raise and said since the last time pay for the role changed, the Councillor role has changed dramatically. She said it's more like a full-time job now and that as Caledon grows there will only be more and more work for Councillors.

A woman who is a senior with a disability asked the candidates about transit in Caledon.

Groves said the Town needs to expand the transit pilot project in Bolton and make sure routes in Caledon connect to other jurisdictions like Brampton.

Groves said young people in the Mayfield and Kennedy area could benefit from transit options that take them to Bolton, as there's employment available for them there. Innis said it's important to think about both the short and long term when it comes to transit. She said the current bus service in Bolton is not frequent enough and does not hit the right locations.

?We need to communicate with residents to ensure the service works for them,? said Innis.

She added Caledon needs to be getting its fair share of funding from the Region for TransHelp and Caledon Community Services transportation. While a GO Train won't be coming to Bolton for a while, Innis said it's still important to plan for it now as by the time the kids of today grow up they might need to use it to get to university, for example.

On the topic of university, another Caledon resident asked the candidates if they had any plans to bring post-secondary education to Caledon. Innis said she and Ward 5 Councillor Tony Rosa have begun to work to secure lands near the proposed future GO Train for a university campus.

She said it's important to start small; that a class can turn into a program that then turns into a campus finally coming to Caledon. She said she's been working to meet with universities and will continue to do so as she advocates for post-secondary education in Caledon.

Groves agreed post-secondary education in Caledon is important and said she's talked to Seneca College about a possible satellite campus.

'The other thing that's really important is we have a skilled trade labour shortage,' said Groves. 'We also need to talk about trade schools? I've been in talks with an investor who wants to bring 2 trade schools here. We need to include that as well in the conversations about university.'

The most heated debate of the evening came when a resident asked the candidates how Caledon lost two representatives at the Region of Peel Council table at a time when Caledon is expected to grow significantly.

Innis said on November 26, 2020, Groves was one of 17 who voted in favour of reducing Caledon's seats at the regional table by two, giving those seats instead to Brampton which had experienced significant growth. Innis said at a December 17, 2020 meeting to ratify the November 26 decision, Groves voted against Caledon losing seats. However, Innis said this didn't matter because of a rule that one Councillor from each Region has to be in attendance at a regional meeting in order for a vote to be held.

Innis said at the December 17, 2020 meeting, the rest of Caledon's regional representation walked out on the meeting in an attempt to stop the vote from happening. Innis said this means despite voting against Caledon losing seats, Groves staying in her seat for the vote in effect made Caledon lose the seats.

'Nobody cares how you voted on the 17th? you stayed in your seat and allowed us to lose two seats and our representation? shame on you,' said Innis.

Groves said the final vote was what mattered and that she stayed in her seat and voted no on December 17 because that's what Caledon residents asked for at a public meeting.

Groves said there was an attempt from the Town to get Ontario's Minister of Municipal Affairs, Steve Clark, to intervene and prevent Caledon from losing seats, but that in a letter dated December 14, 2020, Clark said he would not be stepping in.

Groves reiterated her point that her voting no at the December 17 meeting was what mattered.

Ward 4 Candidate Cheryl Connors later stepped in to comment on the debate between Groves and Innis on the Regional Council seats topic.

Connors said the Government of Ontario gave all regional governments in Ontario two years to restructure their representation.

She said Mayor Allan Thompson, Innis, and Ward 1 Regional Councillor Ian Sinclair were members of the Region of Peel's policy and procedures committee 'which was in charge of the restructuring' and claimed they chose to delay the restructuring item for two years instead of bringing forward a resolution during that time to try and save Caledon seats.

'I'm not really sure that a stunt of leaving for one meeting was going to make a difference. Was the plan to stay out forever?' said Connors.