

Medicinal marijuana facility backed for Highway 10

By Bill Rea

There were questions about procedure Tuesday night as Caledon councillors supported a rezoning that would permit a medicinal marijuana production facility for a Highway 10 property.

Council, sitting in committee, voted in favour of the application of White Sova Holdings for the property on the east side of Highway 10, south of Highpoint Sidereal, based largely on the staff recommendations. The suggestion was contained in a 13-page report which was submitted by Senior Planner Brandon Ward, and his thoroughness came in for praise from some of the councillors, including Mayor Allan Thompson.

‘You have really done your homework,’ the Mayor told him. ‘This is a masterpiece.’

But Councillor Barb Shaughnessy raised some issues. She also said there should be a matrix so there can be consistent criteria applied to such applications.

The report stated the plan is to use existing buildings on the site for the production of medicinal marijuana. Such operations are federally regulated, and the report stated Health Canada has come up with a new regulatory framework, evolving from individual projects. Known as Marijuana for Medicinal Purposes Regulations (MMPR), this framework contains stringent requirements for production and security. It also calls for strictly indoor production, and such operations are not allowed in residential units.

Health Canada has also stressed that municipal regulations have to be followed. The report stated that provision prompted Town staff to review prospective MMPRs to determine where such facilities would be appropriate in Caledon.

The Town had initially favoured putting these operations on prestige industrial and serviced industrial lands, subject to specific zoning, but it was also recognized that certain facilities in rural areas could be feasible, subject to site-specific planning.

The report stated this application was supported by a hydrogeological assessment and preliminary sewage system design that showed the operation can be adequately serviced without negative impacts on surrounding lands.

Neil Davis of the legal firm Davis Webb, representing the applicants, pointed out those two reports were peer reviewed and found to be acceptable, and that there is more than adequate water supply for the operation. As well, we said all potential impacts on surrounding lands have been mitigated and are deemed acceptable.

Peel Federation of Agriculture President Keith Garrett also spoke in favour of the application, stressing the Federation's position that options have to be kept open for farmers.

While most people associate farming with food production, other items are products of agricultural operations. He cited morphine and latex as coming from farms. More locally, he said the heart drug digoxin is derived from plants native to Ontario.

As well, he said many crops are grown in climate-controlled greenhouses. He cited hothouse tomatoes.

Garrett stressed marijuana is a crop and farmers want to have the option of producing it.

But Shaughnessy had some problems.

She complained she had submitted questions from constituents, as well as herself, and not all of them had been addressed in the report.

She also made several comparisons between marijuana and aggregate operations, pointing out both are contentious issues in her ward.

Among the issues that she said had not been addressed were whether a needs study should be required, along with a social impact study. She also had questions as to whether the local aquifer could handle the operation, commenting that Peel Region is pulling water out of the area to service Mono Mills.

She was also concerned about impacts on air quality from such an operation.

Shaughnessy also called for a matrix to be established in dealing with applications like this so the criteria and guidelines can be consistent.

‘We don't have any,’ she remarked.

Ward told her air quality issues from such an operation are federally regulated, and the requirements are stringent. He also said there will be no waste disposal on site. The hydrogeological study determined the well servicing the site can produce more than enough water.

Regarding the call for a matrix, he said all such applications have to be reviewed on a site-specific, case-by-case basis.

Councillor Annette Groves pointed out an operation like this would use a lot of electricity, but Ward said Hydro One raised no concerns.

Groves also commented that the rules regarding air quality are very strict.

Councillor Doug Beffort pointed out when dealing with aggregate applications, the proponent is usually called upon to do base-line testing of local wells so they can be monitored for potential impacts. Ward said that is something that could be looked into.