

Municipal staff to look at implementation of Artificial Intelligence tools

By Riley Murphy

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Following a motion tabled by Mayor Annette Groves at the April 28th Council meeting, Council unanimously approved the direction for Staff to investigate artificial intelligence (AI) tools for potential use within the Town of Caledon.

The motion stated that many municipalities across Ontario, such as neighbouring cities such as Brampton and Mississauga, are already using AI tools to expedite planning workflows, enhance customer service, and improve internal efficiency.

With the Town expressing a desire to expedite growth and development and has signed a Housing Pledge with the Province of Ontario committing to accelerating housing approvals and supporting the province's housing targets, Staff will look at how AI tools can potentially expedite applications, similar to surrounding municipalities.

The Town of Caledon is currently investigating AI tools, including AI-powered search technology, as part of the ongoing website improvement project. The motion stated that this aligns with goals such as the Town of Caledon's 2023-2035 Strategic Plan commitment to Modernization and Innovation.

Councillor Nick de Boer said at the meeting that if Staff will be using AI, Council should also be aware of how it will be used, to ensure a full understanding of how applications will be dealt with.

He suggested that Staff come back to Council in a workshop format in Council Chambers on how AI is going to serve residents, and builders and developers, and how it's going to actually make things better.

Councillor Tony Rosa added that he learned a lot about these tools after attending a workshop at the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) on AI technology.

It's very worthwhile to have a demo on this for Council and for staff and for any members of the public, because I think once you've seen it and the way it operates, you'll be as convinced. It was probably, for me, the best two hours of the conference, because it was an incredible tool that proved to be extremely valuable.

Both Councillors Christina Early and Lynn Kiernan raised concerns about the environmental impact of AI tools and technology.

An amendment was added and approved that a workshop will be prepared to demonstrate how AI will be utilized at the Town of Caledon prior to implementation.

With Staff direction to investigate AI tools for potential use, they will also look at the AI tools currently used by neighbouring municipalities, including but not limited to AI-assisted planning review systems, automated customer service platforms, and AI-supported document analysis tools.

If Staff determines that these tools will assist planning staff in expediting applications and be more efficient in terms of saving time for both staff and applicants, staff will be authorized to implement these tools.