

Petition supporting proposed spiritual centre garners nearly 1,300 signatures

Caledon Council deferred vote on allowing centre after planning staff recommended refusal

By **ZACHARY ROMAN**

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A petition supporting a proposed spiritual centre in Caledon had received 1,295 signatures as of April 9.

Bhavesh Patel, a Caledon resident, started a petition in support of the proposed SMVS Swaminarayan Spiritual Centre after Caledon Councillors deferred a vote on Official Plan and bylaw amendments that would permit the centre's construction at a February 13 Planning and Development Committee meeting.

A Town of Caledon staff report submitted to Council at the meeting recommended refusal of the amendments. As a result of the deferral, the amendments are now set to come back to council this spring.

Rushi Patel, a volunteer for SMVS, which stands for Swaminarayan Mandir Vasna Sanstha, explained that it's an international socio-spiritual and charitable organization that's committed to sharing the principles of Lord Swaminarayan.

?The principles revolve around the vision that every individual should lead a life in harmony with themselves, their families and community? they should strive to attain inner peace amongst the uncertainty of life and become the best version of themselves? said Rushi.

Rushi said SMVS has weekly assemblies for children, youth, and adults that focus on personal growth and learning. This is done currently at its Canadian headquarters in North York, as well as at its locations across the world. SMVS also hosts community activities such as sports and speech competitions for youth, food drives, and yoga and meditation sessions.

Rushi said SMVS is looking to build a spiritual centre in Caledon as it did a survey of its community and many of its members live in Caledon or surrounding municipalities. While SMVS is a Hindu faith organization, Rushi said its spiritual centres and programs are open to anyone, regardless of their faith. He also noted there is no cost associated with attending the centre.

?The spiritual centre is the pinnacle of the vision? a lasting solution to focus on inner peace and mental health,? said Rushi.

He said Caledon is the perfect place for a spiritual centre as its rural nature allows people to experience inner peace and tranquility.

Bhavesh said he was inspired to start his petition in support of the temple as there's currently nowhere in Caledon for followers of the Hindu faith to gather, despite a clear need for it. He said Caledon residents who follow the Hindu faith have to travel to places like Brampton and Mississauga to practice.

The Caledon SMVS Swaminarayan Spiritual Centre is proposed to be built at 6939 King Street, which is where King Street intersects with Centreville Creek Road.

?It's a beautiful location? such a centre would fill a crucial gap in our Town's cultural landscape,? said Bhavesh.

He said support for the petition has been heartwarming to see and that the spiritual centre would serve as a vital hub for spiritual fulfilment, cultural exchange, and community cohesion.

?The primary goal of the petition is to urge Caledon Council to consider the proposal positively and demonstrate the community's

collective needs for such a centre,? said Bhavesh.

Kapil Vaidya, a volunteer for SMVS and said if the spiritual centre is permitted, it will make Caledon a more complete community. He said SMVS wants the spiritual centre to be a beautiful place for the community to gather for long into the future.

?You plant the mango tree not for yourself, but for the generations to come,? said Vaidya. ?We see Caledon as an opportunity for us to develop a place where people can come and have that mental peace, which is very much needed in this world.?