

Proposed Canadian Tire development ?a public relations mess?

The May 28 public information meeting (PIM), required by the Planning Act, for the Canadian Tire distribution and office complex was run by a ?moderator? from outside of town, acting for all of council and staff.

The moderator barely referred to members of council, who he said were forbidden by the Planning Act to make any statements at the meeting. There are no provisions in the Planning Act governing the conduct of members of a council. The moderator threatened at least three times at the beginning of the meeting to have people removed by police if he, the moderator, deemed it appropriate. No criteria were given for what conduct would justify such an extraordinary action thwarting a legislated democratic process under the Planning Act. Threats of citizens' forcible removal by police were a clear attempt at intimidation.

By comparison, Caledon citizens become quite outspoken at gravel strip mine meetings, when faced with poor air quality, increased noise, heavy truck trips, potential loss of ground water and lost property values, but I have never seen police or a threat of ejection at a gravel PIM over the last 34 years.

The moderator set up a presentation system designed to limit open public input at the PIM, wherein Town staff and the proponent's staff and consultants were allowed the majority of presentation time while individual members of the public were only allowed to pose two questions, in the interests of ?limited? time. The proponent's consultants, Town and Region staff were invited to respond to questions by the public but the citizens were then told if they wished to clarify the consultant/staff response they would have to go to the back of the line and start over. This moderator's tactic effectively meant consultants and staff could respond to questions anyway they pleased without concern for challenges. The entire PIM was designed to control the narrative and limit the issues open for discussion.

Presentations by municipal staff and consultants for the proponent were sadly superficial, as were the answers provided to questions posed by members of the public. The issues of major concern to the public were noise, air quality and the volume of truck trips generated by the proposal. These are important health and safety issues to the public, but the cumulative, superficial responses by municipal staff and proponent's consultants led to a general lack of confidence among members of the public in attendance.

Members of council said nothing.

So here we have Caledon, an urban fringe municipality with a pressing need for industrial/commercial assessment on the one hand, and Canadian Tire, probably the most important Canadian owned and best managed retail company in Canada with very strong community involvement, looking for a site suitable for a state of the art, 138,810 square metre distribution centre and associated offices on the other, and both involved in a public relations mess. Canadian Tire executives must be completely confused and discouraged at this point and that is a bad thing. Interested members of the Caledon public are concerned and have no confidence in their council or staff and that is a bad thing.

Ian G. Sinclair,

former Caledon councillor (1994-2003)