

Province asked to speed up zoning for Canadian Tire

By Bill Rea

There's still a lot of heat in Bolton's Canadian Tire issue, as Peel Regional councillors learned last Thursday.

Town councillors, two evenings prior to that, unanimously supported the rezoning and Official Plan amendment being sought by Canadian Tire that would enable the company to place a large distribution centre and office facility on about 180 acres at the northwest corner of Coleraine Drive and Healey Road in Bolton. At the same meeting, they passed a motion requesting Municipal Affairs and Housing Minister Linda Jeffrey to use her authority to order the land uses set out in the applications, and to seek the support of the Region.

Regional councillors went along with the request from Caledon, over the very strong objections of Mississauga Councillor Nando Iannicca.

The preamble of the motion cited the fact that the Provincial Policy Statement calls on municipalities to provide sufficient employment lands to meet long-term needs, and that having the development in Caledon will keep jobs in the region.

Iannicca was annoyed the request even made it to last Thursday's meeting, as he pointed out it wasn't on the original agenda.

But Mayor Marolyn Morrison pointed out the company needs a location for the proposed development, commenting its current site in Brampton is "too antiquated."

She also stated the lands have been set aside for employment since 2009, but that move has been caught up with an Ontario Municipal Board (OMB) appeal that has frozen all employment lands.

She also stressed that Canadian Tire needs a quick decision, adding that hundreds of jobs are involved, and if this isn't approved, the company will take its development out of Peel.

"I don't think we can afford to have them leave the Region of Peel," she remarked.

"I'm pretty sure it's unprecedented," Iannicca commented, adding there are things in his ward that he'd like the Province to advance.

"I've got an LRT (Light Rail Transit) that I need," he said. "Can I rezone it right now?"

Iannicca stressed there is a process that's supposed to be followed, suggesting there should have been a staff report before council dealt with it.

"This is shameful," he declared. "My God, are we going to call it 'The Canadian Tire Rule'?"

He also said there have been cases involving thousands of jobs in Brampton and Mississauga, where nothing like this has been done.

"I'm ashamed that the request has even come forward," he said.

But Caledon Councillor Richard Whitehead said there was no request being made for special treatment, but stressed the reality that Canadian Tire looked at about 30 sites for this proposed facility, and selected the Bolton one, which, he added, is not on municipal land. He also said the company plans to invest some \$300 million in this project, which is going to take three years to build.

As well, Whitehead observed Town council has approved this proposal, along with Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA).

He added Ministerial orders like this are nothing new, pointing out one was used to get the Honda plant in Alliston. He said this is because the municipal process can take too long.

Whitehead said this is an important part of Peel's industrial land inventory, adding the Province is being asked to expedite this. "This is quite an appropriate way that the Ontario government can deal with it," he said.

"It will be a bigger facility than they (Canadian Tire) have today . . . because they are building for their future," Whitehead observed.

"This is a good news story," commented Brampton Mayor Susan Fennell, who stressed the fact jobs are slated to stay in Peel.

Fennell also told Iannicca they were not talking about an LRT, but a private-sector company that is mobile and needs to expand.

Iannicca agreed that what Whitehead had said might be true, but he maintained there should be a staff report to say so.

He also said there have been a lot of requests of this nature from the private sector, and he's never seen something like this done.

"What do I go back and tell them?" he asked.

Iannicca was also puzzled that a large Canadian corporation got into this time squeeze, requiring this urgency.

"Is this not basically going around the process?" asked Brampton Councillor Paul Palleschi.

But Brampton Councillor John Sprovieri said if this is improper, Jeffrey will let the Region know.

"I feel confident enough to move ahead and support Caledon," he remarked.

Caledon Councillor Allan Thompson commented that Canadian Tire has been very patient in this process.

He also agreed with Sprovieri that Jeffrey will decide if there's a problem with the request.

"I think this is what we need to do today," he added.

Mississauga Mayor Hazel McCallion agreed Ministerial orders are not unusual, although Mississauga's never used it. She also observed that if the company stays in Peel, Mississauga benefits.