

Province extends comment period on plans review

By Bill Rea

Mayor Allan Thompson is please that the Province has extended the consultation period for the Coordinated Provincial Plan Review, but he would have liked to have seen it longer.

'It's a step in the right direction,' the Mayor commented.

Peel Regional council had previously called for a pause in the process to allow for a longer consultation period.

The review is looking into four provincial land-use plans: the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, the Greenbelt Plan, the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan and the Niagara Escarpment Plan.

The consultation period was to end Sept. 30, but Municipal Affairs Minister Bill Mauro announced last Wednesday it was being extended a month, to Oct. 31.

'Due to high interest in the review and in response to requests made by several municipalities and stakeholder organizations, we are extending the deadline for comments on the four proposed revised plans to be submitted,' Mauro said in a statement.

Caledon council, earlier last week, had passed a motion with, among other things, asks for an extension until Dec. 31.

Thompson said there will be meetings with the Minister this week at the conference of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO), and he was expecting there will be a push to get a longer extension.

'This is very serious for the municipalities,' he remarked. 'So we're going to ask for December 31.'

He also said Former Mississauga mayor Hazel McCallion has called for a meeting of mayors and chairs in the Greater Toronto Area for Sept. 12, and he said Caledon will be taking part in that.

'It's kind of 'Hazel's Summit',' he observed, adding there's a hope they can hammer together a position for a further extension.

'I think this is going to have the biggest impact on municipalities here,' Thompson said, pointing out people have too much going on during the fall and they need more time to get involved. 'When you have community engagement, you always get good input.'

The motion that was passed last week at council was based on the staff recommendations, although there were changes. Staff did call for an extension, but no specific date was cited. Councillors agreed there had to be something more tangible. Councillor Jennifer Innis had little trouble getting support for Dec. 31.

Innis also argued municipalities like Caledon need to be more forthright and tell the province what they want.

Councillor Rob Mezzapelli said that seemed like a reasonable request.

'There are a lot of things we still have to work out,' Thompson added.

Among the changes the province is considering is increasing the intensification and density targets. The current idea calls for an annual intensification target of 60 per cent and minimum Greenfield densities of 80 residents and jobs per hectare. The motion passed last week by council calls on the Province to lower both those numbers to 'reasonable levels more appropriate to Caledon's current density targets within the Region of Peel.'

Mezzapelli had suggested specifying numbers in this case too, but Manager of Policy and Sustainability Haiquig Xu said it's important to make it clear to the Province that setting targets in Peel won't work.

Innis added maintaining the Province's density numbers would be awkward because nobody knows what it will look like, or what the tax base would be.

She added Caledon has been clear in calling for numbers that are lower and more realistic.

Councillor Barb Shaughnessy agreed, pointing out those density numbers are too high for a municipality that doesn't have public transit. She argued they should be setting up a vision, based on what they are hearing from residents. That way, she said, they don't have to be specific about what the targets should be.

'We should have a more holistic approach,' she declared.

Councillor Nick deBoer wondered if the words 'reasonable levels' in the motion would work, as he pointed out the Town's vision has to fit in with policies the province hands down.

Mezzapelli was worried that wording would put matter back in the Province's court. Shaughnessy pointed Town and Regional staff don't know what the 'appropriate' numbers are.

Councillor Gord McClure observed people are not going to move to Caledon for densities like that. 'Eighty is ridiculous for Caledon,' he declared.

Councillors agreed to call on the Province to reconsider the numbers and 'undertake more consultation with municipalities to assist them in building complete communities.'

Mezzapelli was successful in getting his colleagues to call on the Ministry to provide a presentation to council on the plan review

and address issues raised by staff.

?You don't ask, we don't get,? he remarked.

Councillor Johanna Downey, who sits on the Niagara Escarpment Commission, said a similar presentation was made to that body. Thompson couldn't see why there would be reluctance to do that again.