

Public meeting set for September for BRES

By Bill Rea

A public meeting and open house is planned for Sept. 29 to discuss the Bolton Residential Expansion Study (BRES).

That was the main motion that came after a lengthy discussion of a voluminous staff report on the matter last Thursday at Peel Regional council. A special meeting has been scheduled for next Thursday (July 21) to continue the discussion. There were several different options tossed into the debate, including possible hybrids of various options.

No time or location has been announced yet for the Sept. 29 meeting.

The matter has stemmed from the Town of Caledon submitted a proposed amendment to Peel's Official Plan to have the settlement boundary of Bolton expanded by about 185 hectares to accommodate population and employment growth.

Last week's staff report stated that Regional council endorsed a planning process for the matter in November.

"The planning process lays out a number of tasks and milestones to ensure a fair, open and transparent public process," it stated.

There were six candidate expansion options identified in BRES, as well as three smaller rounding-out areas.

The option the Town has come out in favour of, also known as Option 3, involves lands on Humber Station Road, between the Canadian Pacific Railway tracks and The Gore Road, north of King Street. It's also known as Go Station Focus option. The staff report noted it is close to the site of a proposed GO train station.

The Region released a discussion paper on the issue in April which outlined 18 proposed evaluation criteria which have been organized into six themes: Protect natural heritage features and their associated functions; promote coordinated, efficient and cost effective infrastructure; promote fiscal responsibility; ensure compact, complete and healthy communities; protect agricultural lands and aggregate resources; and conformity with applicable policy frameworks and urban structure implications.

In evaluating the various options, the consultants retained by the Region reported none of them got top marks in all the themes.

Option 3 did well in terms of natural heritage, complete and healthy communities, and urban structure implications. It did poorly in terms of efficient and cost effective infrastructure and fiscal responsibility. Regarding overall scores, the discussion paper said Options 3 and 4 were at the top. Option 4 involves lands to the south of King Street, straddling Humber Station and extending west to The Gore Road.

The staff report also pointed out the previous work, as well as the results of the consultation, point to a need to look at the longer term future of both the Region and Bolton, although the exercise has been focused on growth up to 2031.

Staff recommended that the themes involving fiscal responsibility and long-term urban structure "be given particular emphasis."

Mississauga Councillor Carolyn Parrish was concerned the report didn't have enough detailed financial discussion on the options, including some possible hybrids.

"We need a little bit more financial beef on the plate," she remarked, asking for more details. She cited a hybrid between Options 4 and 5 (Option 5 is directly south of Option 4, straddling Humber Station). She also suggested the possibility of a hybrid between Options 5 and 6 (Option 6 takes in a narrow strip of land on the east side of Humber Station, running between Healey and Mayfield Roads).

Parrish's motion also called for the special council meeting next Thursday.

She said it helps put the brakes on any draft Regional Official Plan amendment getting through too soon, allowing more time to go through the options more thoroughly.

"This is a huge problem," Parrish declared. "It's been going on a really long time."

Caledon Councillor Barb Shaughnessy mentioned the train tracks separating Bolton from the growth options west of the village.

"Grade separation is needed very shortly," she remarked, adding it should happen before any development goes ahead.

Mississauga Councillor Nando Iannicca said he has always argued a hybrid between Options 5 and 6 makes sense.

Caledon Councillor Jennifer Innis commented it was important to move ahead with the public meeting.

Parrish's original motion didn't mention looking at an Option 3 and 4 hybrid, but she raised no objections to Innis adding it in.

Innis also asked for a detailed financial analysis of all the options.

Mississauga Councillor Jim Tovey pointed out people are going to be on vacation next week, and he tried to get the council discussion put off until September, arguing it would still come before the scheduled public meeting.

Director of Integrated Planning Arvin Presad said the time lines would work better if the discussion took place next week.

Caledon Councillor Johanna Downey wondered if all six options will eventually be seeing growth. She also pointed out Option 6 has been set aside as Caledon's employment lands.

"There's a lot more infrastructure that we need here," she remarked.

Caledon Councillor Annette Groves said she didn't recall any talk of the employment lands going there. She also said the Bolton community doesn't need the pressure of more logistics or warehouse development, arguing the infrastructure isn't available.

"We've got lots and lots of buildings sitting empty," she added, commenting they don't need more buildings closing. She pointed to the example of Stewart Maguires Landing, which recently closed its doors.

Mississauga Mayor Bonnie Crombie observed one reason Option 3 ranked so high was the possibility of a GO train station. Public Works commission Dan Labrecque said the GO part was downplayed, with more of an emphasis on broader public transit. He added there are no plans to extend GO rail service to Bolton. He said GO has plans for a line to Bolton in place, but nothing is going to happen in the next wave of growth, or the next couple of waves.

"It is in the plan, but unspecified in terms of time," he said.

Mayor Allan Thompson commented that a GO station had been in a plan for 2021, but was pulled back. He said they won't put it back on until they see some commitment locally. He added officials in Vaughan want some sort of station, but there's no place there to park the trains, which is why Bolton is being considered.

Brampton Councillor Michael Palleschi was in favour of the motion.

"It's a good step in the right direction," he said, adding he liked the hybrid compromises.