

Public split on best option for BRES at public meeting

By Bill Rea

Little was resolved, but much was said last Thursday as Peel Region hosted the formal public information meeting into the Bolton Residential Expansion Study (BRES).

More than 20 people made formal presentations to Regional councillors. Many of the delegations were people professionally connected to one proposed option for BRES or another, although there were private residents who put their voices forward.

There were six main options as to where the residential expansion should go, as well as some additional rounding out areas.

The Town had previously chosen Option 3, also known as the Go Station Focus option, which involves lands on Humber Station Road, between the Canadian Pacific Railway tracks and The Gore Road, north of King Street.

Regional staff in June had recommended a hybrid of Options 4 and 5, an 'L' shaped parcel of land that straddles Humber Station and runs west to The Gore Road, south of King. But Regional councillors overruled their advice and opted for Option 6. Option 6 involves lands that run along the east side of Humber Station between Healey and Mayfield Roads, as well as a small triangular piece of land at the southeast corner of the site. The justification was it was cheaper and made better use of infrastructure already in place. Andrea Warren, manager of development services for the Region and co-manager of the project, said the Town had applied for the expansion in October 2014. She also said Bolton has a current population of about 20,500 residents and some 16,000 jobs. The proposed expansion will bring in another 10,300 people and about 2,500 more jobs.

Warren also said that while the Town had stated it's preferred option, it is the Region that's the approval authority, since it has to be implemented through a Regional Official Plan Amendment (ROPA).

The process for the expansion started with visioning put forth by the Province. Warren said everything that follows has to conform with that. That meant the Region had to conform by deciding where its additional population allocation was to go, and that was accomplished through ROPA. The Town was obliged to decide where Caledon's share of that population was to go, and that was dealt with through an amendment to the Town's Official Plan.

Meetings have been held over the last two years to gather public input and feedback. Warren said the Region obtained the services of a independent planning firm called The Planning Partnership. That eventually resulted in staff proposing the hybrid of Options 4 and 5.

Regional councillors wanted more details of the costs of the options, and in July, they opted for Option 6.

Keith Garbutt, president of the Peel Federation of Agriculture, stressed the need for an effective transportation network, adding a lot of the Federation's members have been involved with the GTA's West Transportation Corridor. If work there doesn't proceed, he said there will be impacts.

Garbutt said the traffic situation in Peel is getting challenging and dangerous. He added that if the Region goes with Option 6, the Province will take it as a sign that Peel does not support the transportation corridor.

He urged councillors to carefully consider transportation planning.

'This is about getting on with life,' Federation Director and former Caledon Regional councillor David Lyons added, commenting members are waiting for some announcement about the corridor.

Mississauga Councillor Carolyn Parrish, who was chairing the meeting, told him the Province is planning an announcement in December.

'We've heard this before,' Lyons said.

'You haven't heard it from me,' Parrish replied.

Local resident Dan O'Reilly expressed his 'indignation and disgust' with Regional council backing Option 6.

'The vote overturned years of work by the Town of Caledon in carefully assessing six possible growth scenarios, of which Option 6 was deemed the least desirable by an outside consultant,' he declared.

O'Reilly added Option 3 would evolve into a pedestrian and transit oriented community, serviced by GO Transit.

'Not only would it be a less car-dependent community than most traditional sprawling and dreary suburban subdivisions, the Option 3 lands would be well positioned to support and sustain Bolton's commercial businesses,' he added. 'That definitely won't be the case if residential development is allowed in the Option 6 lands, which have the double disadvantage of being located in the heart of an industrial area and abutting Brampton.'

He also said most future residents of Option 6 would shop in Brampton.

O'Reilly also suggested the Region could lobby the Province and Metrolinx to advance the schedule of getting GO service to Bolton. Noting that some councillors would have backed Option 6 because it was deemed the cheapest when it came to providing

infrastructure, he pointed out the cheapest ideas don't always add up to the best value.

But there were some members of the public ready to defend Option 6.

Kelly Darnley cited the words of former Regional chair Emil Kolb. She said he had said growth in Bolton would access Mayfield Road, because that is where the services are, so there shouldn't be any leapfrogging.

Warren Darnley, chair of the Caledon Chamber of Commerce, expressed appreciation for the work staff did, but supported the position of council and Option 6.

He also said the idea of a GO station in Option 3 was 'pie in the sky.'

North Albion resident Cheryl Connors called Option 6 a 'fiscally responsible decision,' adding the province doesn't have the will or the money to proceed with the work on the GTA West Corridor.

Connors also said she's talked to a lot of people in Caledon, and they don't want logistic or warehouse development, but retail.

'We need the growth and we need it now,' she declared, adding Option 6 is ready to be built.

Patrick Harrington, a partner with the law firm Aird and Berlis, representing owners of lands in Option 3, said the lands involved in Option 6 have been before the Town, Region and Ontario Municipal Board (OMB) since before 2007. Since then, there have been no documents produced that support residential development there. He said there was a private application in '07 for residential development. It was deferred to give the Region a chance to deal with its growth plan conformity exercise. The result of that was ROPA 24 in 2010.

ROPA 24 was appealed by the owner of lands in Option 6.

Harrington pointed out that the Town had applied for a ROPA based on Option 3, which he said was a private application. Yet the Region was proceeding with a ROPA application for lands that were not included in the Town's application. He likened it to a private landowner seeking a redesignation of one piece of land, and having council approve the redesignation of another property. He also said Caledon's application was supported by the consulting firm Meridian Planning Consultants. He added his clients acquired the land after the Town had accepted the recommendation.

The application made by the owners of the lands in Option 6 went before Regional council early in 2014, Harrington said it was refused, based on the work that had been done in Caledon and on the GTA West Corridor. But he pointed out those lands are being reconsidered.

'This is all going to the Board,' he said. 'What are you going to the Board with?'

He argued staff and the consultants have not supported Option 6.

'What are you prepared to put taxpayers' money behind?' he asked.

Gary McNeil of McNeil Management Services was also the president of GO Transit from 1999 to 2013, and he was speaking in support of Option 3, pointing out Option 6 will encourage the development of lands that do not support the installation of GO service. Option 3 would support that, he argued.

McNeil also said it's a myth to say GO train service to Bolton is far in the future. It's in the 2023 timeline, although it could be moved to 2033, which is still in the planning horizon of the BRES process.

He also said capital infrastructure funding would be available from both the federal and Provincial levels of government.

Councillor Annette Groves pointed out the train service would serve the community no matter what option is selected.

Rowan Faludi, of Urban Metrics Inc., also spoke in favour of Option 3, arguing it would be better to expand existing employment lands in Bolton, rather than creating new ones, which he said Options 5 and 6 would do. He added putting residential development on those lands would be a barrier to employment lands.

Faludi also said Option 6 borders on Mayfield Road, which is a truck route, making it a better place for employment lands.

He also said financing Option 3 could be made easier with the use of Area Specific Development Charges (ASDC). Faludi said they are allowed, adding there's no reason for the Region not to consider them. As well, he pointed out the additional expense can't be passed on to the people buying the homes.

Parrish asked staff to prepare a report on ASDCs.

Glen Schnarr of Glen Schnarr and Associates Inc. cited the work that has been done by Meridian Planning, naming Option 3 as the most preferred one, with Option 6 coming in last. He also pointed out Regional council has never seen a presentation from Meridian, adding Caledon council supported the recommendation unanimously.

In terms of commercial considerations, Schnarr said Option 3 will support retailers in the Bolton core, while people moving into Option 6 lands will be more oriented to shop in Brampton.

He also argued Option 3 would result in a more healthy environment.

He also defended the idea of ASDCs, pointing out they would not add to the costs of houses. The marketplace will set the costs.

Lawyer Michael Melling, of Davies Howe Partners, representing the Option 6 landowners, said they have made three detailed submissions.

"We support the Regional Official Plan Amendment that has been prepared and brought to you by your staff," he remarked.

Melling said it's easy in a process like this to look at all the reports and get into "a confusing fog of opinion," suggesting councillors consider facts and things like costs that can be quantified, and "not falling into the trap of assigning false precision to opinions."

He argued his clients proposal is much cheaper.

Melling pointed out the Region is in the middle of a staff-led study looking at development financing.

"We're going to follow your process and we're going to respect your decisions," Melling told councillors.

Addressing the issue of GO Transit, Melling said a station will serve everyone in all of the options.