

Reader disappointed by OLT decision

OUR READERS WRITE

(Re: Caledon, OLT say no to Caledon East Tim Hortons drive-thru. July 24, 2025)

I was disappointed and perhaps I can even say appalled to read the glad handing and self-congratulatory statements by those persons quoted in your article, particularly those of our elected politicians, who see the OLT's decision as a victory.

In fact, it is a loss for everyone.

I began weekend commuting to ski country through Caledon East back in 1979. Our family moved to Caledon in 2009 and I have lived in Caledon East since 2021. I have always looked upon Caledon East as forgettable and unremarkable yet I have seen potential since day one. The biggest challenge with small town development is that everyone without money to invest tries to tell those people with money to invest how and where best to do it. Such an incongruity often leads small towns to be underdeveloped, which is how I have seen Caledon East since 1979.

After reading the article on Saturday morning, I decided to take a walk around Town and better visualize the issues at play. I had a great laugh when I located the properties in question and associated with the word 'heritage' in your article. One is a tiny, beaten-up single-story home apparently not lived in for years. The second is a large, two-story cement block house you could not pay me enough to call home. The third is the property that includes the tiny ice cream stand. The world's first 'heritage ice cream stand'??

Just how did a commercial business such as this get permission to be this close to the sidewalk? Can Tom's Family Restaurant now expand its outdoor seating right to the sidewalk as well?

Although it is the land that is of obvious interest to the Tim Hortons developers and the battle seems to be over the issue of a drive-thru, I can't see the future of development on these sites should be held up by the importance of the buildings involved.

Are decision-makers making bad decisions here to compensate for horrendous decisions in the past?

I have an MBA and a long career in retail marketing so I feel I might have something worthwhile to add to the debate about drive-thrus in downtown Caledon East.

On balance, I support a drive-thru. They are the much-preferred option for seniors, the disabled, parents with small children and commuters and we should not ignore the needs of any of these groups. I also understand the 'slippery slope' argument against a drive-thru. Say 'yes' to one and it is possible the entire downtown might just become a collection of drive-thrus. I think, though, the OLT's decision might have actually done Ganni Properties a big favour.

How?

It is a well-known fact that high volume retail businesses like coffee shops and gas stations should be located on the side of the road that most commuters take to work in the morning. In this case, to be on the west side is the correct decision for the developers. However, another truism is that commuters do not like to backtrack in the morning.

If we look at the hundreds of people soon to live in the homes being built on Airport Road just south of our downtown, I really question the wisdom of a decision to build a drive thru coffee shop north of this impending mass of new commuters. Were the Tim Hortons to be built on the property in question, few of these residents would, in my opinion, make the trip north to get a donut and coffee before heading south to work each morning. I think a far better location for a drive-thru Tim Hortons would be on the west side of Airport Road somewhere just south of this new development.

I also think the potential exists to open a satellite Tim Hortons location (without a drive-thru) on the properties in question. Why two locations? The downtown location represents a wonderful opportunity for the decision-makers at city hall (and elsewhere) to work with the developers to find ways to say 'yes.' Why not find a way to make this Tim Hortons a 'heritage' design triumph? If so, others will follow and the results will be unbelievable.

Ultimately, economic development only moves forward when we start hearing 'yes' a lot more than hearing 'no.'

In my walk around town on Saturday, I see all the evidence of the decades that our decision-makers have been saying 'no.' The empty block beside the LCBO. A long-abandoned pet grooming business right on Airport Road. A short-lived thrift store, now sitting empty. A bakery restaurant finally realizing dark gray has no curb appeal. A giant, mostly empty, parking lot beside the Pizza Hut. I could go on (and on) but I won't.

I had breakfast at Tom's on Saturday morning. Great food, great value, great people. What brings more people downtown will help Tom's and the others to thrive.

A final thought. The Town can talk about 'heritage' but many easy steps can be taken now in that direction. For example, if you look at many other so-called 'heritage' small towns, you will see that all the street signs reflect a heritage design. It's a small touch that would go a long way in downtown Caledon East.

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