

Region bypasses staff on Bolton expansion plans

By Bill Rea

There's a lot of disagreement as to where Bolton's residential expansion should take place.

Peel Regional councillor last week rejected the advice of their own staff and voted in favour of the expansion going in the southern most option, also Known as Option 6, or the Solmar Development lands.

The Town of Caledon had previously chosen Option 3, also known as the Go Station Focus option. It involves lands on Humber Station Road, between the Canadian Pacific Railway tracks and The Gore Road, north of King Street. Option 6 lands run along the east side of Humber Station between Healey and Mayfield Roads, as well as a small triangular pice of land at the southeast corner of the site.

Support for option 6 passed by a 13-9 vote. Councillor Annette Groves was the only Caledon representative to support it, and Mayor Allan Thompson was not pleased about that.

‘Caledon got a slap in the face today, but not by Regional staff,’ he remarked after the meeting. ‘I’m quite disappointed in Councillor Groves.’

‘I believe that the Mayor's message attacking me was quite inappropriate and misleading and not factual,’ Groves said in a statement Monday. ‘I supported this because it was the only motion before us and I strongly believe growth should pay for growth and should benefit our community no matter who the developer is. I also supported this because our community needs a healthy and sustainable vision for its future and not more warehousing as the Mayor intends to do south of King Street. Our community deserves better than just warehouses which creates little jobs, truck traffic on our roads and a lower standard for our community.’

Regional staff had gone into last Thursday's council meeting backing a hybrid of Options 4 and 5, an ‘L’ shaped parcel of land that straddles Humber Station and runs west to The Gore Road.

Adrian Smith, manager of integrated planning for the Region, said that hybrid was the one staff was recommending be brought forward for a statutory public meeting, scheduled for Sept. 29. There will also be a public open house Sept. 14.

Smith told councillors the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe from 2006 set out targets to plan and manage growth, and it's been determined that Bolton is well situated to accommodate growth. The plan is to have 10,300 more people living in Bolton by 2031 and another 2,500 jobs, and that will require adding about 183 hectares to the settlement area.

The Region retained the services of The Planning Partnership to prepare a discussion paper for the required Regional Official Plan Amendment (ROPA). Smith said they concluded that both Options 3 and 4 would be supportable.

The hybrid of Options 4 and 5 is not the cheapest of the options, but he said it best balances the criteria and makes efficient use of existing infrastructure.

He also said the next step in the proces is the public meeting, with input available on all six options. Smith added a draft ROPA is needed for that meeting.

Bruce Taylor, growth management strategist with the Region, said the developers for Option 3 have proposed to front end water, wastewater and road costs interest-free. He added there hasn't been enough time to study the details.

He also said Option 6 would be the cheapest one.

Thompson was upset that Option 3 was not the one being favoured by staff. He said it should have been considered out of respect for Caledon residents, since that was the one the local councillors supported.

‘It's like a slap in the face to Caledon,’ he remarked.

Smith said there will be complete information at the public meeting in September, including details on Option 3. He promised there will be ‘open, transparent and complete sharing of all information.’

Thompson wanted something stronger, putting forth a motion to have a ROPA reflecting Option 3 at the meeting too. The preamble of his motion stated that ‘Caledon had filed a complete application to the Region.’

Director Legal Services and Regional Solicitor Patrick O'Connor had a problem with that, stressing the Region has to have one and only one draft ROPA for the meeting.

Regional CAO David Szwarc said they can't have a draft ROPA with two options, although he added other options could still be discussed.

Councillor Jennifer Innis wondered if there had ever been a position from a municipality on a ROPA that had been different from what the Region wanted. Smith told her there have been cases where the region made significant changes. He cited the example of Northwest Brampton. ‘I'm sure there are other as well,’ he said.

Arvin Prasad, director of the integrated planning division, said the differences in Northwest Brampton were resolved at the Ontario

Municipal Board (OMB). He added that while there will be a draft ROPA at the September meeting, there will still be a long process to follow.

‘It’s the Town that initiated this process,’ Innis replied, adding the Town’s process has been peer-reviewed and it’s only fair that the draft ROPA include Option 3.

Thompson agreed to withdraw his motion, since it appeared it might be illegal.

It was Brampton Councillor Martin Medeiros who put forth the motion that Option 6 be favoured in the ROPA, citing the fact it would have the least financial impact on Brampton. He said he couldn’t justify adding more of a burden on the Brampton taxpayers. O’Connor said council could support whatever option it wants, but if the matter ends up before OMB, it will be a disjointed council position there.

Groves said she had previously talked about the challenges facing business, as well as economic vitality, arguing Bolton doesn’t need any more employment land. She said she had been talking to a person who had been in business in Bolton for 30 years, and the bank has taken it over.

Groves said there are numerous residents and business owners in Bolton who are at risk of losing all they have, and she also pointed out there are people in her ward who don’t shop in Bolton.

She also said Bolton doesn’t need warehouses and employment lands, adding it doesn’t look attractive to new investors to have businesses close.

‘The ones who are open are hanging by a thread,’ she declared.

Brampton Councillor John Sprovieri said they should go to the public with all the possible options, and see which one people prefer.

Regional Chair Frank Dale said they can still get information and comment on them.

Councillor Barb Shaughnessy didn’t think residents’ voices have been heard. She thought the Region was trying to predetermine something, and thought people need to believe a well-rounded decision is being made.

‘We are not planners,’ she said. ‘We are representing the people.’

Shaughnessy advocated supporting the staff position, pointing out that backing Option 6 would mean hiring outside planners if the matter gets to OMB, and that will be an expense for the taxpayers.

She called for taking the staff position to the September meeting, ‘and let the cards fall where they fall.’

Thompson stressed the need for employment land, commenting he knows of 19 businesses that can’t locate in town because there’s no land available. There’s not enough land for existing businesses to grow and expand.

Mississauga Councillor Carolyn Parrish said the developers might be willing to front-end the costs in Option 3, but that expense will be picked up by the people buying the houses.

‘This isn’t somebody giving us free money,’ she said.

Parrish said Option 6 is more fiscally responsible, as it uses existing infrastructure that’s already been paid for.

‘Poor Bolton has been in the dark ages,’ she added.

Parrish called backing Option 6 a ‘slam dunk.’

‘Nobody’s going to build a mess up there,’ she added.

‘This is not purely a financial exercise,’ Brampton Councillor Elaine Moore observed as she said the Region had an obligation to process Caledon’s application. She said the Town would have considered a host of issues, and it would not have been one-dimensional exercise.

‘Caledon did their due diligence,’ Moore declared, adding the representatives from Caledon should have been more forceful in backing their position.

Councillor Johanna Downey commented that no one in her ward shops in Caledon, and she predicted that 10,000 people moving into Option 6 would go to Brampton for their shopping. Backing Option 3 would bring more people to the Bolton shopping area, she argued.

But Groves argued people will travel north and south for shopping, so all six of the option would support Bolton.

‘Bolton is the hub,’ she said. ‘We created that hub We need to feed it.’

Groves also said the village core is a ‘ghost town.’

‘It needs people,’ she declared.

Mississauga Mayor Bonnie Crombie said she had studied all the options, and she said Option 3 didn’t make sense in terms of being cost effective, adding much of its support was based on a ‘hypothetical GO’ train station.’

She also pointed out Caledon Propane is next to this future residential area.

Crombie said the option favoured by Regional staff was a safe one, but concluded Option 6 was the most cost-effective.

?It makes the most sense,? she said. ?It's shovel ready. It's the fiscally responsible thing to do.?
?I can't make any sense out of this conversation,? Brampton Councillor Gael Miles commented, adding everything she was hearing flew in the face of what the Region should be doing. ?This is the most unorthodox process that I have ever seen in 28 years in government.?