

Region outlines process for Bolton residential growth

By Bill Rea

The plans for Bolton residential expansion are still drawing lots of interest, although not a lot of emotion, at least at this time. It's estimated that more than 200 people packed the Caledon Seniors' Centre last Thursday evening for the public meeting hosted by Peel Region, but the crowd was mainly quiet. There were few outbursts from the floor.

The Town has already gone through the Bolton Residential Expansion Study (BRES) process, and has decided where the expansion should go. It's on lands known as Option 3, or GO Station Focus, north of King Street, between the Gore and Humber Station Roads. But the expansion needs a Regional Official Plan amendment (ROPA) to take effect, which was the point of last week's meeting.

Arvin Presad, director of integrated planning with the Region, told the meeting Peel's population currently stands at about 1.4 million, and the plan is to add approximately 350,000 more by 2031, and some of that growth will be coming to Bolton.

The BRES exercise was to determine where an additional 10,000 people and 2,500 jobs would go in Bolton. Presad said the purpose of last week's meeting was to share information about that, as well as encourage residents to share their comments.

"In essence, what we want to do is start a conversation," he said.

He also said the Region is not trying to restrict the work that Caledon has already started doing. He explained the Region's process is aimed at evaluating the merits of the Town's selection of the lands for expansion, as well as to consider all candidate sites through a Regional lens.

Andrea Warren, manager of development services with the Region, said there have already been more than 30 submissions from the public on this, adding there will be opportunity for more.

The ROPA application was made in October 2014, with the primary uses being planned for being residential and retail. There were six areas being considered, with the Town eventually deciding to concentrate on Option 1 (known as North Hill West) and GO Station Focus.

Warren also said this process builds on Caledon's tri-nodal growth strategy, focusing coming growth to Bolton, Caledon East and Mayfield West.

She also said the Region, in November, called for a facilitation process to address issues concerning proposed employment lands on the west side of Coleraine Drive. The facilitation settlement called for a variety of factors to be considered, including stakeholder input.

Explaining the planning context, Warren said the province provides the foundation for municipalities to plan for growth. In this case, the province has set the figures for growth. Peel's ROPA 24 in 2012 set out the number of new residents Caledon would have to accommodate.

The Region has a large role when it comes to growth management. It's the Region that provides water and waste-water services, meaning there has to be a master plan for providing the needed infrastructure. Peel also has to address matters like long-term financial planning, housing and homelessness and providing for healthy communities.

Peel's Official Plan calls for a long-term strategic policy framework, addressing things like healthy and sustainable communities, understanding and seeing to ecosystem features, having a competitive and diverse economy and sound tax base, managed and staged growth and development, and growth and development that takes in environmental, social economic and cultural concerns.

Warren said the Town's selection of its preferred site included a number of criteria, including finding logical extensions to current built-up areas, minimizing impacts on existing and planned employment lands, as well as farms, the capacity of the road system to accommodate the development, supporting the establishment of GO Rail service in Bolton, optimizing the use of existing and planned community infrastructure, etc.

The general themes that have been included in the comments received so far include financial, environmental, servicing and transportation.

Warren said the next steps in the process will see the input brought together in a discussion paper, either late in March or early in April, and will likely go before committee in May and Regional council in June. There will be another public information meeting, probably in September, and a final report going to council in December.

Mary Hall, director of development approval and planning policy for the Town, outlined the process the Town followed in BRES, with a study area that was roughly bordered by Castleberg Sideroad, Caledon King Townline, Mayfield Road and The Gore Road. The area was eventually narrowed down to six options, along with three smaller rounding-out areas. All the options were considered, with the two being approved for further study, as well as the rounding-out areas.

Hall said there were a number of technical studies used to look into things like servicing and infrastructure, agriculture, environment

and natural heritage, and transportation. Selection criteria was set out, and Hall said it was reviewed by Town council, the public stakeholders and agencies.

The criteria narrowed down the potential options to two, and finally to the GO Station Focus.

There were some proponents of the other options who offered their views.

One man favouring the North Hill West option said it would be a logical place for development, with two high schools nearby, as well as a community centre and the new fire hall planned for Bolton would be in walking distance. He also pointed out one disadvantage with the GO Station Focus is it's on the other side of the rail line running through the village.

As well, he pointed out there are plans for a 40,000-square-foot food store in the area of Columbia Way.

He agreed preparing for GO Rail is important, but the timing is a problem, as he said Metrolinx has put rail service to Bolton off the agenda for some time to come.

In addition, he said using Option 3 would take out better farm land than Option 1.

A lawyer representing land owners in Option 4 (King Street West) called for a more comprehensive study of all the options, adding the objective has to be to apply good policy.

One man, living in one of the rounding-out areas, was curious what would happen there. Warren told him the Region is giving those areas the same consideration as the other options.

"The Region of Peel has not picked an option," she declared.

Presad added the town has gone through its process, and now Peel's doing the same, and that includes looking at the Town's position.

"I never saw any material in the mail that said what you just said," the man replied.

A north hill resident was concerned about new residents doing their shopping at Zehrs or Walmart, without any more parking spots being added. She pointed to the southern-most option, Option 6 (Humber Station Road), pointing out new people coming to that area might not do their shopping there, "and hog our parking spaces."

She added a lot of these people would be working to the south, such as in Toronto, so that option might be better for them.

One woman urged officials to make decisions wisely, so they will benefit the community, and not to base them on back-room deals.

One man advocated approving all the areas for growth and letting development proceed.

"You can drag this out for another 15 years," he said. "Why can't they just rubber-stamp everything and just move on?"

Presad commented the provincial documents set out the population projections, and Caledon's share of the growth isn't enough to include all the options.

"It needs to be done with thought, some careful thought," he said.