

Resident feedback sought on how Council meetings are run

By **ZACHARY ROMAN**

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Do you feel improvements could be made to the way Caledon Council conducts business?

If so, you may want to make your voice heard in the Town of Caledon's procedural bylaw review process.

On August 25, the Town announced it was undertaking a procedural bylaw review, something it usually does once per term of Council.

Caledon's current procedural bylaw was enacted in 2015 and, according to the Town, it's been updated periodically since then.

A municipality's procedural bylaw sets the rules its Council and Committees must follow when conducting business.

This includes the rules for how Council and Committee meetings are run.

A page has been posted on Caledon's community engagement website, haveyoursaycaledon.ca, outlining the details of the review process. Here, the Town says its goals with the review are to improve the council/committee meeting experience for all; ensure decision making is effective; reflect changes to technology; and incorporate changes in legislation and best practice approaches.

A public open house, which has not yet been scheduled, will allow Caledon residents to share their opinions on procedural bylaw improvements.

Residents who would rather provide feedback online can do so at the website listed above, where there is currently a survey available.

Ward 3 Councillor Doug Maskell said on the whole, he thinks Council functions effectively right now ? and he likes that General Committee meetings and Planning and Development Committee meetings are kept separate.

Maskell said it's important for these meetings to be separate so it's clear for residents what is happening at a given meeting.

?We're not merging issues together? I think that's good,? said Maskell.

Maskell said something he'd like to see improved is the way the Town answers resident questions in staff reports.

He said when residents delegate at a Council meeting and leave a question with the Town on an agenda item, it may very well get answered in the staff report written about the item ? however, he said not everyone has the time to read entire staff reports. Sometimes, reports can be over 30 pages long.

Maskell said he'd like to see a schedule or appendix to reports titled ?delegate questions? so people can easily find the answers to their questions in a staff report.

?[Delegates] have taken the time and effort to come out and delegate and ask very pointed questions? I think [my idea] honours people's time,? said Maskell.

He said it can be a stressful experience for people to come and speak at a meeting, which is another reason he said it's important to

make people feel like their efforts are worth it.

Maskell would also like to see a change to the way delegates are grouped at meetings. He said delegates speaking to the same agenda item should speak after each other, and that Council/Committee should then speak to and vote on that item.

Also, in the interest of time, Maskell said it could be pertinent to put the items with the most people delegating to them earlier in the agenda on any given meeting. This way, people at the meeting who only care about one issue could delegate to it then be on their way.

"The idea is that you're honouring people's time and interest, gauging what people have come to talk about," said Maskell.

Maskell said he doesn't want to see Council or public meeting start times moved any earlier than 7 p.m. as a result of the procedural bylaw review because it would be unfair to the working public. He said even getting to a meeting by 7 p.m. can be tough with traffic and family commitments.

Regional Councillor, Wards 1, 2 and 3 Christina Early said as Caledon grows, some committee meetings might need to start happening during the day ? however, she said the public portions of those meetings should always remain in the evening so people can attend them easily.

Early said she would be happy to merge Council's General Committee and Planning and Development Committee meetings.

"I'm going to be interested to hear from the public as well, because they always have a good perspective," said Early, adding she believes it's good for municipalities to review their procedural bylaws.