

Residents provide feedback as the Town hosts first Future Caledon Official Plan open house

By Rob Paul

With the Future Caledon Official Plan process well underway, the Town held a virtual open house on the evening of October 18 for the public to get an idea of what the plan will potentially entail, as well as to give feedback and ask questions.

The official plan is being created by the Town of Caledon to act as a road map for how the community will develop, locate housing, build transportation networks, locate employment, offer community facilities, amongst other aspects of growing and developing. The idea is for it to guide decision-making with land use while protecting the environment that Caledon is known for as well as to prepare infrastructure for the expect population boom.

The process of the Future Caledon Official Plan began in 2019 based around five focus areas: natural resources and agriculture; tourism, heritage, healthy communities, and culture; transportation, technology, and infrastructure; growth, settlement, housing, and employment; and climate change.

The final official plan is expected between 2022 and 2023.

Currently, the plan is still in the first of three phases, known as Phase 1: Background Review and Visioning. This phase is focused on the project team working to understand the local context, review current policies, conduct a best practice review, and identify policy gaps?it's also the phase in which the team seeks feedback and input from residents.

Monday night's open house? and there will be more open houses to follow?acted as the start of a conversation between the project team and residents. Over 80 residents joined the Zoom call that was led by Town staff members Ed Sajecki (Acting Chief Planning Officer), Bailey Loverock (Community Planner), and Kant Chawla (Senior Transportation Officer) as well as consultants from WSP Andrea Counsel, Ryan Adamson, and Matt Rodrigues.

Much of the open house was an overview of what the project team has put together to this point, as well as a way for residents to provide their point of view, concerns, and support for decisions.

It also allowed for the project team to take the feedback into account while continuing to develop Phase 1 of the Caledon Future Official Plan.

There's been community feedback throughout the last few months that the project team has been taking into account, most notably from an online survey that was open to the public until October 7.

?So, what did we do with your feedback? Based on the results of stakeholder and community feedback, we prepared a revised vision statement,? said Adamson. ??Caledon is a sustainable, connected, and complete community. We celebrate our heritage, diversity, and rural roots, and are stewards of our environment.?

The most notable and frequent feedback from the residents in attendance at the virtual open house was that the vision statement for the plan needs to incorporate terms like ?safe? and ?protected.?

With the Region of Peel also working on its Official Plan, residents wanted to know how much that influences or impacts the Town's plan.

?In terms of implementation, the local municipal Official Plan is required to conform with the Region's Official Plan and certainly there's been discussions between the Town and Region in terms of important matters,? said Counsel. ?There's a dialogue that

happens there and the Town has opportunities to comment on the draft (Region) Official Plan and is ultimately required to conform to those policies.?

?The Official Plan for Caledon does have to conform with the Region's plan, but at the staff level we're in constant dialogue with staff at the Region of Peel,? said Sajecki. ?In the perfect world we would be in perfect harmony, but we know the world isn't perfect and we expect there to be some points of disagreement along the way. But ultimately, the Region's plan does have to be approved by the Province of Ontario, so the Province does have the right to go in and make modifications to the Regions plan.?

Given the current state of the world with COVID-19 still having an impact on day to day life, there were questions about how the pandemic has impacted the plan, specifically with employment?especially since the planning process began pre-COVID.

?I think there are big changes happening,? said Sajecki. ?Even before COVID, there was a lot of interest in people increasingly working from home because you can do it with technology, but it had never really been tested. It's been tested through COVID now, and there are many companies who are saying they'll work from home entirely. We'll see where it all balances out, but I'm convinced there's a changing nature in how employment is organized.

?Someone asked earlier about the status of the employment study underway and that's been one of the questions we've been asking. I don't think anyone completely understands it yet, but there's no doubt in my mind that going forward there will be changes and we were moving in that direction, but COVID has just accelerated it.?

A hot topic of the open house was the environment with Caledon being in the Greenbelt and concerns over aggregate operations.

?The Region and the Town are jointly undertaking a review of the aggregate resource policies,? said Mark Dorfman, an aggregate planning consultant. ?The Region probably will have a draft of their work and our work jointly probably sometime towards the end of this year. Caledon is also doing its own review and that's where I come in as an aggregate advisor. We have not yet framed our policies; certainly our starting point is the existing Caledon Official Plan aggregate resource policies, since then the provincial government has made significant changes in the legislation and regulation and standards.

?So, quite frankly, we need to start doing some deep thinking. We all know that over the next 30 years the Greater Golden Horseshoe will be growing by 4.6 million people, which is more growth than we had in the last 30 years. Obviously, there's a need for aggregate resources and so the thinking is that we need to have a better model for dealing with aggregate resource operations?including transparency, oversight, and rehabilitation and how we'll deal with after uses. That's where we're going and hopefully we'll be able to frame policies for discussion with stakeholders and the public.?

With the potential of Highway 413 having a major impact on Caledon both environmentally and in terms of development, a handful of residents wanted clarification on how the Future Caledon Official Plan can deal specifically with the highway.

?To be perfectly clear, we're not the decision-makers on Highway 413, that's going to be decided by the Province of Ontario,? said Sajecki. ?What we are doing through the Official Plan is looking at the land uses?and obviously whether the highway is built or not will have an impact on that?but it's still a provincial decision.?

?This is a provincial initiative with going forward with the GTA West Corridor (Highway 413) to accommodate growth provincially, they're not focused on one community or the other,? said Chawla. ?They're mandate is provincial interest and that's how they're moving ahead. On the other side, the process is still ongoing with the federal impact assessment that will dictate whether the GTA West process has followed all of the rules.?

There are plans for additional open houses for the residents of Caledon to give feedback as Phase 1 is completed. For more information on the Future Caledon Official Plan and upcoming engagement opportunities visit haveyoursaycaledon.ca.