

Some people still angry over Canadian Tire

By Bill Rea

There's still some anger in Bolton over the massive Canadian Tire development, and residents got a chance to vent some of their feelings last week.

About 50 people were on hand for a community meeting. It was hosted by Councillor Annette Groves, although Councillor Rob Mezzapelli was an active participant in the session, and Canadian Tire issues took up a lot of the discussion.

There were several attempts to put Mezzapelli on the defensive, and a number of people tried to shout him down when he put forth his positions. He maintained his cool, although there were some jeers at what he had to say. At one point, he admonished a man to watch his language.

He expressed his belief that the majority of Bolton residents are not opposed to the Canadian Tire development.

The latest controversy has dealt with the corporation's efforts to seek a site plan amendment that would allow the production and storage of hydrogen on site, to be used internally to power equipment.

Groves said there has been information presented that hydrogen is a clean fuel that will be used a lot in the future. She stressed she was not denying that, but she was calling for a public process in this. Amending a site plan does not normally require a public information meeting.

"We don't want this to go under the radar, like the building was under the radar," Groves declared.

Groves also admitted she's not an expert on the topic, and said she invited representatives of Canadian Tire to the meeting.

The development of the distribution centre at the corner of Coleraine Drive and Healey Road was moved ahead in July 2013 when the Ministry of Municipal Affairs issued a Ministerial Zoning Order (MZO) that allowed the work to proceed. Groves said she has found nothing in the MZO referring to the production of hydrogen.

She argued that if the corporation believes hydrogen is safe, they should come out and explain it to residents.

Mezzapelli said he disagreed with Groves.

He maintained there were no secret meetings or attempts to undermine public process when the development was approved. MZOs are rare, he said, and they are only issued in matters of significant provincial interest. Mezzapelli added the councils at the Town and Peel Region both supported the MZO by large majorities.

A lot of the planning work in Caledon has been focused on deciding where employment lands should go, and Mezzapelli argued the lands west of Coleraine are a logical place for such development.

He also said he's done his own research and determined that the traffic impact from Canadian Tire will be less than had there been other types of employment development. He said there could be 30 warehouse operations there, or 80 manufacturing facilities and the truck traffic would be the same. With Canadian Tire, it will mean there's one operation with coordinated traffic movements.

One woman countered they will be constant movements, day and night.

As well, Mezzapelli said there had been no opposition when that was designated employment land.

He agreed a downside is the employment density will be low from developments like this. But reality is this type of industry is what the area is going to get.

Mezzapelli also pointed out if there are a number of industrial operations on these lands, there would have to be an internal road network installed, and the Town would be responsible for maintaining it.

One woman at the meeting told Mezzapelli that was not what his constituents wanted.

Mezzapelli countered he went door-to-door during the last election, talking to thousands of people. Some were cautious when it came to the development, but he didn't go along that the community was opposed to it.

There were petitions signed opposing it, but he knew there were some who signed who didn't have complete information. He said he tried to provide them with that during the campaign.

That didn't satisfy everyone.

One woman told Mezzapelli about 1,000 people signed those petitions, and she charged he had a responsibility to vote the way those people wanted.

"You don't have an opinion when you are representing us," she declared.

Mezzapelli reiterated his belief that the majority of Bolton residents didn't oppose the development.

"This is our community," another woman called out, accusing Mezzapelli of being political.

"You're entitled to believe that," he replied.

There were arguments that the production of hydrogen should not be going on near an urban area.

Mezzapelli said he's toured Canadian Tire's current Brampton facility, where there is hydrogen. He said it's a fuel, adding it doesn't burn, but is used to generate electricity. He also pointed out there are seldom complaints if a gas station goes near a residential area. Some people were not convinced that the development approval followed proper process.

"The deal was done," one woman declared, adding the distribution centre should have gone someplace else, like Tullamore.

"We're talking about a refinery," she added, wondering if the fire department has the training and equipment to deal with problems that could arise from the hydrogen.