

Special Events By-Law open house draws concerned fair boards and local organizations

By Riley Murphy

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The Town of Caledon recently held an open house to discuss its proposed Special Events By-Law, which aims to establish requirements for large public events to improve and proactively address anticipated community impacts.

At the Open House, numerous fair boards and organizations attended, concerned about what this might mean to their longstanding events.

In the proposed by-law, a Special Event is defined as any indoor or outdoor activity, parade, festival, concert, exhibition, assembly, or other event that is open to the public, including events conducted outdoors under tents or other non-permanent structures, on private property, at which more than 500 persons are anticipated to attend, or do attend, during any one day.

Types of events not regulated by this proposed by-law would be public or private events on Town-owned or public property, private events hosted on private property, and weddings, large family gatherings, birthday celebrations, etc.

The proposed Special Event permit process falls into two streams: Standard Event Intake for events not requiring exemption from one or more Town By-laws, and Complex Event Intake for events seeking exemption from one or more Town By-laws.

“The scope of what we’re trying to do with the Special Events By-law is to support tourism events that are happening in Caledon,” explained Ahsan Rasheed, Senior Economic Development Officer with the Town of Caledon.

He says they’re trying to mitigate any impacts that happen to the community with these events such as noise and traffic.

“We recognize that we want to bring tourism into Caledon, it’s a great economic driver into the Town but we also want to make sure that we’re looking after our community and that we’re not unnecessarily impacting the residents of our community,” says Rasheed.

The open house was a chance for them to receive feedback to continue to shape their draft by-law.

With wording such as “fairs” built into the proposed by-law, fair boards, such as the Bolton Fall Fair and Caledon Fair, voiced their concerns about what this new by-law would mean for them.

Heather French, 1st Vice President of the Albion and Bolton Agricultural Society, spoke about how they’re currently securing vendors and planning for their longstanding community events, such as their Tractor Pull and Fall Fair.

With these dates fast approaching, she expressed concern that passing this by-law would put them under a strict timeline.

Emily Quinton, Tourism and Culture Officer for the Town of Caledon, reassured that, from their understanding from an agricultural society and fairground standpoint, their zoning permits hosting events like fairs and all that comes with it.

“This is not concerning fairs; it’s not putting regulations on existing fair events. We’re trying to talk about public events on private property that are not zoned for that,” says Quinton.

Town Staff also explained that last year’s RBC Canadian Open is what triggered the momentum, bringing this Special Events By-Law forward, as Caledon has never experienced an event of that size before.

They explained there was no process in place for appropriately requesting the necessary items to address traffic, noise, and other environmental factors that could impact the environment or nearby residents.

?As Caledon grows and continues to become a successful tourism destination, which some of your businesses and peers know very well, we, as economic development, feel that we should have a better plan in place for moving forward,? added Quinton.

?We can't, in good conscience, keep welcoming tourism events in an unsustainable way.

The intent is not to overburden event organizers who are willingly working with us. The intent is to understand and work with them a little bit closer, to make plans that will benefit the community, that don't overtax our infrastructure.?

Downey's Farm attended the meeting as well and was concerned that, with their large attendance, the way the proposed by-law is written could loop in existing businesses like theirs, as well as breweries and other tourism businesses that receive more than 500 people a day.

Staff answered that they are looking at options such as having an internal administrator to handle applications on a case-by-case basis, and for longstanding businesses to have their mitigation plans in place so they can be logged on record, so that each year they do not have to re-evaluate everything.

Fair boards in attendance, such as the Caledon Agricultural Society and the Albion Bolton Agricultural Society, voiced their suggestions for rewording the proposed by-law as it pertains to fairs and their work.

?That's what the biggest challenge is for us with all our by-laws,? said Joel Assaly, Policy Analyst with the By-law Department at the Town. ?How do we make sure that the good operators continue to operate without affecting them, adding more costs and bureaucracy?but we deal with the bad ones and make them pay for what they're doing??

?We're trying to do what's best for you guys without affecting you,? Assaly told the boards in attendance. ?That's why we want feedback to make sure we're not creating issues for businesses that have been around for a while, but we have the tools to deal with the bad actors, per-se.?

Town Staff assured that agricultural societies are a large part of the Town of Caledon, and they're not looking to add burdens to them.

?We want to make sure that we're protecting and supporting business agriculture, but we also have to make sure that we don't open that door too much. Otherwise, we get the bad players,? said Ben Roberts, Interim Manager, Business Attraction and Investment with the Town of Caledon.

The fair boards in attendance recommended that, for an agricultural society to be recognized under this by-law, it must be under the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, which they are all part of.

?We're actually an agricultural society. Every one of us here is a volunteer, and when you get a volunteer that doesn't accept money and cares so much about what they're doing and what they represent, we deserve a say in the new by-laws,? said Ed Taccone, President of the Caledon Agricultural Society.

One thing Staff suggested was forming a working group with representatives from local community groups and agricultural societies to help discuss the by-law together.

Staff is aiming to amend the by-law and bring the report to Council's April 7 committee meeting for public review, with a goal of bringing it before Council at the end of April for a final vote.