

Thompson says Town keeps working to meet challenges

By Bill Rea

Although he's only been on the job a couple of months, Mayor Allan Thompson seems pretty pleased with the way things are progressing in Caledon.

It was an upbeat talk he recently delivered at his first Mayor's Business Breakfast at the Royal Ambassador Event Centre.

He admitted it's been quite a shift to move into the mayor's office after 11 years as a councillor, adding council is setting direction and policy for the Town.

He also praised the Town's economic development department as champions who help local business people face their challenges.

"It's time," he said, adding it's time for all levels of government to look at old ways of doing things and changing with the times.

"People are getting tired with regulation and getting weighed down."

Thompson stressed the need to welcome business to the town and get rid of the red tape that might impede such development. The Town staff and council have been working on that, he said. During the recent budget deliberations, changes were made to the process of the process involved in rezoning and site plans for subdivisions with an aim to expediting things. He added the building permit process has been streamlined too.

The Town is also working on improving customer service, with some positive initiatives coming soon.

"Stay tuned," he said.

The Mayor said they're looking to hire staff to help people through the process, as well as watching what's being done in other places to improve customer service. In the efforts to keep applications moving, they are finding efficiencies, such as getting in touch with people through emails and phone calls, instead of just sending letters.

"We are turning things around," she said.

Another challenge that is special to Thompson is coming up with a plan to bring high-speed internet to Caledon. He raised the issue in his victory address the night he was elected mayor in October.

"This is a real challenge," he said. "It's no longer a luxury. It's essential."

He added it's going to take co-operation from the federal and Provincial governments to get on the band. Thompson observed there is fibre cable being run up Regional Road 50 to serve the Caledon Pan Am Equestrian Park in Palgrave for the coming Games.

"That's going to be a huge help for Bolton," he declared.

He also said they are working on having WiFi infrastructure installed in new developments in town. That's the way new intelligent communities are working," he said.

Providing roads as they are needed is another big challenge Thompson mentioned, tying it in with the need for internet. He pointed out they can't build roads fast enough, so better internet service would enable more people to work from home, thus taking the stress off the roads.

The Mayor said partnerships are the way to make things move forward. He pointed to the need to work with businesses, adding if they are profitable, so is the community. He reminded the audience that business sponsors sports teams, support charities and do a host of other things for the community, so making them profitable is an investment in the community.

He added partnership with Equestrian Management Group, Toronto and Region Conservation Authority and the Town has resulted in the equestrian facility in Palgrave.

Addressing issues in Ward 1, Thompson commented that the community lost a swimming pool last year that the community had sponsored. Residents there want and deserve a pool, so that's an investment that needs to be made in the community.

Thompson said they are opening doors, but will need collaboration to make the community thrive. And there are also challenges.

He pointed to the GTA West Corridor which runs through Town. The question is whether it's a detriment to the municipality or an economic driver. Thompson said it's a big opportunity to bring in employment land. While most of the land in Caledon is protected by plans covering the Niagara Escarpment, Greenbelt and Oak Ridges Moraine, 19 per cent of the town is in the Whitebelt, so a plan is needed on how to use it. There also needs to be an employment base to make the rest of the town sustainable.



Mayor Allan Thompson recently addressed the audience at his first Mayor's Business Breakfast. Photo by Bill Rea