

Town backing 'new approach' to growth management

By Bill Rea

Peel Region has come up with a 'new approach' to dealing with the management of growth, and Caledon councillors Tuesday voted to endorse it.

Councillors were sitting in Planning and Development Committee Tuesday. The matter will still have to be ratified by council. Regional councillors in March received a staff report entitled The New Approach to Planning, Servicing and Financing Growth in the Region of Peel. They also agreed to establish a working group of staff at the Regional and local municipal levels to review alternative options for financing infrastructure growth, as well as consult with various stakeholders.

In an update to Town councillors Tuesday, Senior Policy Planner Kathie Kurtz said the latest set of numbers for growth in the Region were approved by the Province in June 2013. The Region started an Official Plan review and set up a Growth Management Committee (GMC). She added the Town was working on its own growth forecasts for the time up to 2031 and 2041 to submit to the Region.

It's the Region that's to decide how much growth each of the three municipalities receives. Kurtz said staff at the Region is putting together the growth forecasts it gets from the municipalities to see if it fits in with the growth plan.

The latest distribution figures from the Region call for Caledon's population to be up to 113,000 by 2031, and 146,000 by '41. In terms of employment numbers, the plan is to have 49,000 jobs in Caledon by 2031 and 78,000 in '41.

Kurtz said the growth forecasts have been endorsed by the area councils and were presented to GMC in April 2014.

The committee deferred action on the forecasts, pending the development of a sustainable business plan for financing the growth, Kurtz said. There were several workshops and presentations, and staff was told last July to come up with another approach for looking at alternatives for financing growth.

The 'new approach' was presented to GMC in March and the working group was established.

According to the minutes of the March meeting, Commissioner of Finance and Chief Financial Officer Stephen VanOwewegen told the committee of several challenges and risks involved in managing growth, including provincial forecasts, lack of employment growth, intensification targets, providing infrastructure prior to growth, infrastructure debt prior to the 2008 recession, etc.

The 'new approach' discussion paper was prepared by Nichola Crawhall, a consultant with Westbrook Public Affairs. She told the committee she had met with area municipal planning staff to get insight on the two-tier planning process practised in Peel.

The working group is slated to conduct further discussions and consultation, and Kurtz said it's anticipated they will come up with a recommended growth scenario, complete with capital plans, servicing plans and a draft land budget by the fall.

She added Regional staff plans to have a final land budget and Regional Official Plan amendment ready by June 2017.

Kurtz assured Mayor Allan Thompson the numbers that have been put forth are being accepted by Brampton and Mississauga.

Councillor Rob Mezzapelli expressed some concerns about the numbers changing in a couple of years. He said the Town has done good work with the current numbers, considering servicing costs, etc. He wondered if the 'new approach' would take away from some of that work.

Councillor Barb Shaughnessy pointed out there are old census numbers from 2011, and new ones coming in this year. She wondered if they would impact the growth figures.

Kurtz told her the 2016 numbers will be looked at, but Town of Caledon figures won't be released until next year, with more detailed information coming in 2018. The aim is to have Peel's growth plan in place by June 2018.

She added any changes resulting from the 2016 census numbers will have to be considered by the province in the next five-year update of the growth plan.

Thompson said this issue has been discussed at length at GMC.

'I know we've definitely beat this to death,' he remarked.

He stressed the big challenge is building complete communities. The employment tax base is too small to sustain that. Increasing the employment base is tricky in Caledon because about 80 per cent of the land is protected by various Provincial plans.

Thompson said there are a lot of businesses that want to locate here, but the land base and population numbers are not in place.

Mezzapelli agreed it's important to plan for employment growth in a fiscally sustainable way, but that's not the only factor to be considered. He said there are community criteria that are very important to the residents, but might not be mentioned in a fiscal report.

Councillor Annette Groves agreed it's up to the town to plan a healthy community. For example, she said it's important for people to be able to get to work without having to drive.

?It's not just putting the pipes in the ground,? she said.

The current employment levels will not be sustainable by 2031, she added, commenting she didn't know if the ratios set out in the Province's Places to Grow documents will work for Caledon.

Groves said she didn't have the solution, but she said they have to work with the Region to look at the big picture, rather than start all over when the province issues new numbers.

?This is a perfect example of growth having to pay for growth,? Councillor Nick deBoer observed.