

Town looking at employment around highway

By Bill Rea

A large highway will eventually be traversing its way through Caledon, and the Town is seeking public input on what type of development should surround it.

The Town hosted a public session recently at Brampton Fairgrounds to get a feeling for what the public wants, mainly in terms of employment land opportunities.

Kathie Kurtz, senior policy planner with the Town, told the meeting the Province allows municipalities to protect employment lands beyond a 20-year horizon, which is not the case with lands being considered for residential development.

She added the idea was not to start designs for development, but to start identifying lands in the Town's Official Plan for future employment designations.

Nick McDonald of Meridian Planning said the Province has narrowed down the possible routes of the proposed highway to a short list. He added it's been acknowledged that this will have a significant impact on the community, and the Province has allowed for more forward thinking when it comes to industrial and commercial lands. He added municipalities are allowed to identify such lands, but not designate them yet.

McDonald said his firm has been retained to facilitate the discussions and make recommendations to the Town. He also agreed the process is very complex.

"We certainly understand there is a lot to think about," he remarked.

McDonald added a number of complications are possible, such as the Province deciding to delay the highway.

The right-of-way for the new highway could be up to 170 metres wide, allowing for 110 metres of freeway and another 60 metres of transitway. At six lanes, the 25-kilometre road is likely to cost almost \$500 million, or about \$19 million per kilometre. There would likely be six to eight interchanges on the road in Caledon, and at \$25 million each, that would add between \$150 and \$200 million to the cost. There would also have to be bridges, land acquisition, road and drainage improvements, etc. He said it will be the most expensive highway infrastructure investment in Ontario since Highway 407.

Although Caledon has a vast land area (some 687 square kilometres), McDonald reminded the audience about 85 per cent of that is protected from development by plans governing the Niagara Escarpment, Oak Ridges Moraine, Greenbelt, etc. That leaves only about 105 square kilometres for possible urban development, also known as the White Belt.

Assuming there would be 50 people or jobs per hectare, McDonald said that mean up to 525,000 residents and positions coming to Caledon.

"I think most of us would agree that this is a big number," he commented, adding the scale of development expected for Caledon would be comparable to what's happened in Brampton and southern York Region over the last 40 years.

He also pointed out these potential employment lands should be seen as a key asset.

McDonald outlined the suggested steps that should be followed.

They include identifying the nature of potential land uses, identifying location criteria, as well as potential locations for employment growth and including strategic employment areas in the Official Plan. He stressed this process is about prioritizing areas, not timing their development.

McDonald observed that since 2006, almost half the new industrial development in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) took place in Peel. He added about 20 per cent of all jobs in Peel are in the goods movement sector, with about 16 million square feet of goods movement floor space being developed between 2001 and 2014. He added that trend is unique to Peel.

He also put a series of questions to the people at the meeting, including what types of industrial uses should Caledon try to plan for lands adjacent to the coming highway? whether there should be a focus on manufacturing, goods movement or a combination of the two.

When it comes to locating employment lands near the highway, McDonald said there are criteria that need to be considered, such as proximity to the freeway network, including interchanges and arterial roads; having good access to that network without having to go through residential or commercial areas; proximity to support uses, like repair garages; availability of large parcels of land (he had said the average size of new goods movement facilities was more than 500,000 square feet); a limited number of incompatible land uses in the area; and availability of services, like sewers and water.

He asked to the audience to consider which of those criteria should get more priority, as well as whether any other criteria should be considered.

For identifying preferred locations for strategic employment lands, McDonald said the options include clustering such development in lands west of Bolton; between Airport Road and Dixie Road; between Tullamore and Sandhill; between Mayfield West and Victoria; and on both sides of the planned highway.

Other factors that will have to be considered include the limits of the Greenbelt Plan, and the fact that prime agricultural land takes up the bulk of the White Belt. There will also have to be consideration of the location of existing and permanent land uses; the significant changes to driving patterns that will result from the new highway; the current location of major employment areas in town and the surrounding area; impacts that future employment densities will have on the amount of land that should be identified; deciding whether the highway should be used as the edge of a future urban area or the anchor; and the need to plan a complete and healthy community.

When it comes to interchanges, McDonald observed every highway is different, but the Province has maintained having them eight kilometres apart is best in an ideal world. He added where ever they go, there will be impacts on what's around them.

He also told former councillor David Lyons they haven't calculated revenue from development charges and taxes. Lyons was concerned that the province hasn't stated how this is going to work out financially.

Kurtz also pointed out the Town will benefit from more industrial and commercial assessment to relieve some of the tax burden from residents.

One man observed that any scenario favours bringing infrastructure up through Brampton.

McDonald said that's being looked at, but there are no answers yet. They hope to have more information in the next couple of months.

A Dixie Road resident observed there are other traffic issues that need to be addressed too, such as distracted drivers, cyclists sharing the road with cars, etc.

?That has to be part of the thought process,? he said, adding decisions have to be based on the health and safety of people.

Another Bolton area resident pointed out health and safety issues also include noise. He charged that noise abatement matters have been neglected for decades. ?It hurts people and it needs to be addressed,? he said.