

Town makes its choice on route for east-west road

By Bill Rea

The Town of Caledon has settled on its preferred route for the highway planned for the GTA's West Corridor.

Town councillors last week agreed with the staff recommendations regarding the route. There were also suggestions regarding any connection with a realigned Highway 410. The road currently curves to the west once it crosses Mayfield Road, between Dixie and Heart Lake Roads, and runs until it connects with Highway 10. There are proposals to run the 410 straight north. Council passed an amendment to the staff recommendations stating that any options regarding that road be justified by traffic analysis, including local and regional road improvements.

The staff recommendations came after a comprehensive and detailed process.

Town CAO Doug Barnes pointed out this has been based on an environmental assessment exercise that was started by the Province. He added staff has recommended changing the criteria to give much more weight to agricultural issues. He added these changes were prompted by input from the public.

Mary Hall, director of development approval and planning policy for the Town, confirmed a lot of staff time went into the recommendations, as she also stressed the Town is just a commenting agency on this issue.

"We are hoping it's the final report," she told councillors.

The original evaluation criteria were broken down into four sections; natural environment, land use and socio-economic environment, cultural environment and transportation. Staff suggested the addition of agriculture, also suggesting the five categories received equal weight.

Hall explained staff took the entire study area running through Caledon and divided it into a grid of 30-hectare squares or cells. They studied each one, first using the original four criteria (agriculture had been a subfactor in one of them), but realized it needed more priority. Each of the 280 cells were evaluated. The result was different colours being assigned to each cell on a map, with darker cells indicating a higher impact.

She added staff's position changed a few times during the process.

Addressing the Highway 410 alignment, the staff report had indicated several options had been considered. But they had settled on aligning part of the highway on Heart Lake, allowing room for major employment development on the east side of the road. There are also thoughts of realigning Heart Lake slightly to the west. Hall said there have been meetings with the impacted property owners. The majority supports the proposals for the 410, and there's been appreciation for all the work that's been done.

"This was the best that staff was able to do with regard to all the information we had available to us," she commented.

Other parts of the east-west preferred route have it crossing Mayfield Road into Caledon just east of Humber Station Road, crossing north of Old School Road between Torbram and Bramalea Roads. It runs north of Old School until it crosses back south again near the intersection with McLaughlin Road and crosses south of Mayfield again between Heritage Road and Winston Churchill Boulevard.

Mayor Allan Thompson agreed a lot of work went into coming up with the recommendations.

"I know we've got a lot of things to sort out here," he added.

Councillor Nick deBoer asked Hall if the north-south link was really needed, wondering how much traffic would be added to the 410.

Hall told them they had been asked that question a lot, adding there had been no further information provided.

DeBoer stressed there's been no definite word that the realigned 410 is needed. He pointed out residential development is not far away, and he wondered about the social impact on the community.

The alignment was on the mind Maja Mitrovic, of the legal firm Lawrence, Lawrence, Stevenson LLP, who was representing property owners at Lots 18 and 19, Concession 2 in East Chinguacousy, and commented the alignment favoured by staff will seriously impact her clients' ability to develop their lands.

Planning consultant Scott Arbuckle agreed there had been no need explained for the 410 realignment, and he suggested the Town ask the Ministry of Transportation (MTO) for some justification. He added if the need is real, it should be possible to make the best of a bad situation.

"I don't want to give MTO any recommendations," Councillor Doug Beffort declared. "Let them come back to us with what they require."

Planning consultant Colin Chung, representing landowners in the northwest area of Brampton, asked the town's preferred route be shifted to the east when it crosses Mayfield Road, putting it east of Heritage Road. He argued that will have less impact on

agriculture as well as less severe environmental impacts. He also said there will be more connectivity with a GO station in the area and it will tie in more with work that's already been done in the city regarding a proposed north-south road.

DeBoer wondered about that, commenting there didn't seem to be a lot of difference in the square cell on the map in that part of the study area.

Hall defended the calculations of staff, commenting the score assigned to the preferred route was clear.

Policy Manager Haiqing Xu added it was based on a numerical score, and there was a noticeable difference from the other alternatives. He also said that to make an exception in that small area would mean changing the whole methodology that's been employed.

DeBoer argued it would make more sense to try and align things with the road being planned in Brampton, by Xu pointed out it's the Province that's running this process. If there are conflicts between municipalities, it's up to the Province to settle them, while the Town follows its process.

Councillor Rob Mezzapelli acknowledged he's never been a huge fan of this issue, but the Town has been forced into it by the Province. He also warned that if councillors were about to start picking apart the methodology, it would have to happen across the board.

He added the Province will go through with the broader exercise, no matter what the municipalities do.

Councillor Barb Shaughnessy was also against picking apart the methodology for just one part of the study area.

"I support my planners here in Caledon," she said.