

Town to continue advocating for GO Train service

By Zachary Roman

Continuing to build a business case for future Caledon GO Train service is going to cost the Town of Caledon up to \$650,000.

At Caledon Council's May 17 General Committee meeting, Council passed a motion to authorize the creation of a \$400,000 capital project for technical studies to advance the business case for the Caledon-Vaughan GO Rail Project.

The motion also authorized an additional \$250,000 in funding to StrategyCorp, a firm that provides advisory services to help the Town advance the Caledon-Vaughan GO Rail Project.

Council first authorized a \$300,000 single-source contract, for the same purpose, with StrategyCorp in 2021.

The money for both of the items in the motion will be expensed evenly from the Town's tax-funded operating contingency reserve and roads development charges.

Councillor Nick deBoer put forward an amendment to the motion before it passed, a requirement to ask York Region and the City of Vaughan to share proportionately in the costs of the business case work. The motion was passed as amended.

Councillor Ian Sinclair said he had a number of questions about the Town's involvement in funding the business case for GO Train service.

"I don't understand the role of Metrolinx, do they not do anything? What do they do?" he asked.

"Caledon seems to be undertaking the technical work to justify the business plan for it? why on earth are we paying for Metrolinx's work? Surely that's their job to work on the business plan," said Sinclair.

He suggested getting in touch with Metrolinx before spending any money on the project.

Andrew Pearce, Caledon's Director of Engineering services, said as the GO Rail is a strategic priority for the Town, staff have been doing all they can to advance it. Pearce said staff have been in touch with Metrolinx and that Metrolinx staff have a full workload; thus, the Caledon-Vaughan GO Rail is not an immediate priority for them at this time.

Pearce said Metrolinx's next regional transportation plan is expected in 2023 and the Town is trying to advance its case to be a priority in that plan.

He said everything he knows about York Region and City of Vaughan staff leads him to believe they will support Caledon in cost-sharing business case work.

"What we're suggesting is investing a bit now, to advance that delivery of the GO service," said Pearce.

He explained York Region and the City of Vaughan have expressed verbally their intent to support Caledon in the cost of required studies for advancing the business case, such as a capacity analysis.

Councillor Tony Rosa said he'd like to see more than verbal intent, as he said the work that needs to be done will benefit both regions and municipalities.

Councillor Lynn Kiernan echoed his concerns.

A motion to refer the item back to staff until they could receive confirmation from York Region and the City of Vaughan that they'd be willing to cost-share was put forward and supported by councillors Annette Groves, Tony Rosa, Sinclair, and Christina Early.

However, the motion was lost as Mayor Allan Thompson and the rest of Caledon Council opposed it.

Caledon's Chief Administrative Officer, Carey Herd, said Town staff believe the work on the business case is critical for Caledon's future and needs to be done as expeditiously as possible; and that's why Caledon is taking the lead.

Mayor Allan Thompson said he believes in the experts from StrategyCorp as they have experience in rail planning. "If we want to change the way communities thrive, we're going to have to do a bit of investment here and these are the experts that know how to do this," he said.

Councillor Groves said she agreed with Sinclair, and that Metrolinx should be doing the planning work. "Why are we doing Metrolinx's work? We have an MPP here, she should really be advocating for the advancement of our GO train service," said Groves.

She also said she didn't like that the staff report requesting funding for the business case was added as an addendum to the May 17 meeting's agenda, and that residents who check committee meeting agendas when they are posted on Fridays may not have had a chance to read it and be involved in the decision-making process.