

Umm, a data centre?

by SHERALYN ROMAN

There have certainly been rumours and lots of chit chat about data centres, not just here in Caledon, of course, but all around the world. Data centres might be the single, largest, industrial-sized user of resources, sucking up electricity like an unsupervised child in a candy store and hoovering water at rates so alarming it's hard to draw any kind of fitting analogy to express it. Treating earth like it's their own personal playground and consequences be damned, data centres, it might not be too much of a stretch to say, may just be the undoing of us. And now it appears, at least on paper, that right here in Caledon the conversation about data centres has indeed hit ?close to home.?

I had the chance to review the agenda for the Council meeting that took place just this past Tuesday, July 28. It was no small feat as the entire document is 339 pages long! I've read books that were shorter than that. But I digress. During that review, several pages caught my eye. Noted as Item 13.7 of the General Committee Meeting Minutes dated Tuesday, July 7, 2026 was a concerning discussion about data centres in Caledon. It was the particular reference to an application by the Matthews Group ?that could include a Data Centre? that really stood out.

So those rumours of potential land development in the southern portion of Caledon including a data centre? They just might be true.

Here's what bothered me. In a motion forwarded by Councillor Maskell, and seconded by Mayor Groves, was the following wording: ?Whereas in the Town of Caledon, a developer, Matthews Group, on behalf of Quad Real Property, has requested that a Ministerial Zoning Order (MZO) be granted to develop an 82-hectare employment development that could include a Data Centre; and Whereas there are already existing electrical capacity issues across southern Caledon, particularly, in Southfields Village and Mayfield West areas; and Whereas, proposed residential and industrial developments in southern Caledon could be delayed or impacted by the amount of water needed to operate a Data Centre; Now therefore be it resolved that Staff be directed to research the impact of Data Centres on communities; and Further that Staff complete an analysis of the net economic benefit to a community of approving a Data Centre; and Further that Staff bring forth a ?Made in Caledon? process by which to proceed if a Data Centre is proposed for Caledon.?

Perhaps you, like me, not only caught the mention of a potential data centre, but also the reference to yet another MZO. How many more of those does Caledon need? I'd like to think none, and that we have already done our share, but here we are.

As for the data centre, in a follow up to the original motion, Councillors Early and Kiernan moved and seconded an amendment to add the following clause: ?1. AND FURTHER THAT Council direct staff to investigate and report back to Council regarding an Interim Control By-law to provide for a moratorium to be imposed for a minimum period of one (1) year on the acceptance, processing and approval of any new municipal planning applications related to Data Centre development within the Town of Caledon, commencing upon adoption of this resolution and remaining in effect until Council has received and considered the staff report, completed public consultation, and established a comprehensive ?Made in Caledon' planning framework to guide future Data Centre proposals, whichever is later.? Finally, the two items (the motion and the amendment) were joined together and a final motion (moved by Councillor Maskell and seconded by Councillor Russo) was voted on.

Given the alarming rate at which Caledon is developing, particularly in its southern quadrant, and given what we are slowly coming to understand are the consequences to the environment of building of data centres, I believe this addendum to the motion, to further delay any potential onset of their development to be an important one.

I suppose this is a rather long-winded way of saying I have some concerns. This would be true even if the motion approved a delay and there was no immediate threat to Caledon. I am raising them here for several reasons. First, to help bring attention to the fact that a data centre is even a remote possibility is important. Most of us don't have the time to review 300+ pages of a Council agenda and assorted minutes, but sometimes, it's necessary in order to stay informed about the potential impacts of council decisions on our

community.

Second, communities all around us are enacting similar motions and/or investigating the consequences of data centres and with good reason. Collectively we all need to be a part of those conversations and not left on the sidelines, or worse, find ourselves unwittingly approving an MZO that may or may not contain a planned data centre just because all of our neighbours said no. Finally, it's an opportunity for us all to be prepared and watchful for that period of time when public consultation is solicited as part of the 'comprehensive' 'Made in Caledon' planning framework to guide future Data Centre proposals.?

One last thing stood out but it might just be a question of timing. The minutes noted that Council recessed briefly at 4:35 p.m. before voting on the motion/amendment. Mayor Groves also left at 4:35 p.m. but not before putting forward the original motion. However, Council reconvened at 4:42 p.m., at which time the vote took place, even though Mayor Groves had not yet returned. The minutes noted her return at 4:59 p.m., so she missed the vote. For the sake of accuracy, Councillor de Boer also missed the vote, but the minutes list him as absent for the entire meeting. Finally, they further show that Councillor Kiernan left at 5:27 p.m., but not before voting.

Bottom line, the rumours are real, Caledon. Discussions are taking place. Choose as you wish how to interpret the minutes of the General Committee Meeting and the motions that were voted on, and who voted on them that day. For me, it's an opportunity to ensure that the volatile topic of data centres is on everyone's radar.

Caledon's environment is already under attack. Caledon has already approved multiple MZOs. I'm not sure we need any more MZOs, or that anyone needs a data centre. Go ahead and accuse me of 'nimbysism,' I'd probably agree with you.