

Virtual tour coming to explain hydrogen facility

By Bill Rea

It looks like there's going to be a hydrogen production facility at the new Canadian Tire facility in Bolton.

And there are calls for an education component to be included so members of the public can understand what's being done.

Councillor Annette Groves brought the matter up at last Tuesday's council meeting, commenting that Canadian Tire has put forth an amendment to its site plan application to allow for the production of hydrogen. She pointed out this is not like a rezoning, meaning a formal public information meeting is not required for a site plan amendment. But she recalled statements from the corporation when the issue of hydrogen was last raised in 2014, promising that if production were to go ahead, they would be open with the public.

At the time, the corporation's Senior Vice-President Duncan Fulton had issued a statement that plans for a hydrogen fuel cell pilot had been temporarily suspended at both their Brampton and Bolton facilities, "And we will be public and transparent about any intention to restart the pilot projects after reviewing additional research and due diligence."

"It's a huge issue," Groves declared, as she asked staff to look into whether the company would be holding a community meeting to address concerns of the public.

While a meeting doesn't seem to be in the cards, the corporation is developing a virtual video tour of its Brampton Distribution Centre to show people what the future site will look like.

"We want to make sure that residents see for themselves what a hydrogen production facility looks like and help them understand that hydrogen is a safe and environmentally-friendly green fuel that produces zero emissions that will soon have a place in our cars and in our homes," read a statement that the corporation emailed to the Citizen Tuesday. "Through this virtual video tour, we want to give residents an opportunity to see for themselves what the Mayor and councillors have seen when they toured the Brampton facility, and we believe this will go a long way in providing accurate information."

Mayor Allan Thompson said Friday he was aware they were working on the virtual tour. He added to give the public actual tours of the Brampton facility would not be possible, owing to possible liability issues.

He agreed too that a meeting is not likely.

"To hold a public information meeting during the summer vacation is next to impossible," he observed.

He also said he and Fire Chief David Forfar toured the Brampton facility, and he was impressed with what he saw.

"It's a good thing," he said. "It's clean energy."

He also said Environment and Climate Change Minister Glen Murray has said hydrogen-powered vehicles are the way of the future. The important thing, Thompson agreed, is to educate people. There are many who hear the word "hydrogen" and think of the hydrogen bomb.

"It's not explosive," he said. "It's green energy."

He also said the process is simple, involving the use of electricity to separate it from water.

Groves later said the revised site plan application was submitted sometime in June, but she didn't learn of it until later. She added Town staff told her the application was for a facility for both the production and storage of hydrogen.

"This community feels very strongly about the production side of it," Groves commented, although she pointed out the corporation is maintaining it's safe. "They need to come to the community and tell us that."

She recalled the company had promised to be transparent two years ago. "They have not been," she declared, adding they could have let the public know, or her as a councillor.

"Educate us," Groves urged. "Canadian Tire needs to come out and talk to us."

"Make us feel comfortable," she added. "That's all I'm asking."

Thompson couldn't say if opponents to the idea will be satisfied by the virtual tour.

"At least I can't be accused of not trying," he said.