

Deputy Mayor encouraged by transit discussions at ROMA conference

Written By **MIKE BAKER**

Deputy Mayor Steve Anderson is continuing his fight to bring a dedicated transit service to Shelburne.

The local politician, flanked by Dufferin County CAO Sonya Pritchard and Warden Darren White, met with provincial officials on Jan. 27 to press home the importance of establishing a Metrolinx bus route between Shelburne and Orangeville.

"Transit is a big issue in Shelburne. It has been for a long time," Mr. Anderson told the Free Press. "I've been fighting to bring a transit service to the community ever since I joined Council (back in 2017). I've had multiple discussions with MPP Sylvia Jones. She has been very supportive of our initiative."

Serving as an official delegation at the Rural Ontario Municipal Association conference, held in Toronto last month, Mr. Anderson, alongside Mr. White and Ms. Pritchard, had the opportunity to present to MPP Kinga Surma, parliamentary assistant to Transportation Minister Jeff Yurek.

There, the Dufferin team shared individual stories with MPP Surma about why a transit service is needed today.

"We made a pitch about extending GO transit service to north Dufferin and really tried to provide the minister, and his team, with reasons why we feel the time to do that is now," Mr. Anderson said. "I really wanted to go in there and give them a sense of urgency so they can see this isn't something we're looking for 20 years down the road, but rather this is something we feel our residents need now."

After making their presentation, the delegation submitted an in-depth package highlighting a transit feasibility report published in 2016, as well as including several personal stories about Dufferin County residents who, currently, struggle to travel because of the lack of transit options available to them.

"I wanted to make our submission more personal, rather than all about numbers. We shared stories about our seniors, who are finding it difficult to make medical appointments. Students who have to forego schooling or part-time jobs when their parents can't drive them to Orangeville. Adults in our community who would like to pursue other opportunities, but can't because they don't have access to a car," Mr. Anderson said. "Those were the stories we provided to the group and, based on the comments we heard, they were well received."

Discussing the feasibility report, which Mr. Anderson believes will soon be outdated, it was revealed that 85 percent of residents polled who currently commute would support a transit service and/or make use of a line if one was installed.

The problem with that report, which was produced in 2015 and published in 2016, is that the numbers don't necessarily match up with where Shelburne, as a community, is today.

"That report is based on numbers that are now four years old. Conservative statistics at that time had the population of Shelburne in and around 7,000 people, with a projection to hit 10,000 by 2025. The conclusion, at that time, was estimated ridership (of the existing line between Orangeville and Brampton) would increase by 15 percent," Mr. Anderson stated.

He continued, "Since 2015, we've become the fastest growing town in Ontario, and the second fastest in Canada. We have 600 new homes coming onto the grid in the next year or two. I made it clear that, at the time, ten-year projection will be smashed in a year or two. We'll be at 10,000 residents by 2021."

While he didn't discuss details over the regularity of buses running between Shelburne and Orangeville, Mr. Anderson noted use of

the Orangeville to Brampton line, which currently has one of the lowest riderships in the province, would certainly increase if more people from Dufferin County could access the service.

While adding a line between the two communities would certainly help, Mr. Anderson suggested there could also be changes made to the current service, suggesting the potential for express and mid-day lines down to Brampton.

"As we continue to have conversations with the ministry, we will continue to make the case that some adjustment in their current schedule would be beneficial if they're looking to get more butts on seats," Mr. Anderson said.

Moving forward, Mr. Anderson will wait to hear back from the ministry to see if there is an appetite to establish a GO service in Shelburne. In the meantime, we shared with the Free Press that he was already looking into a "potential Plan B" in case things don't work out.

"I'm not a believer of putting all your eggs into one basket. Even though that basket seems sturdy right now, I think it's prudent to explore all of our options," Mr. Anderson said. "We need to look at Plan B's and Plan C's. The warden, CAO and myself have talked about some of the options that may exist. We may have to run something of a parallel road to the discussions we're holding with MTO officials."

Having worked on the transit issue for the best part of 18 months, Mr. Anderson was keen to temper expectations when asked if Shelburne residents could expect to see a bus route established in the near future.

"It's hard to put a timeline on things at this point. I will simply say we've made steps in the right direction. For years, there's not been very much traction on this issue, but having secured a delegation on the back of the recent motion from the County supporting our cause, we have reasons for optimism," Mr. Anderson said.

"Of course, there are no guarantees, but I like the way things are looking right now," he concluded.