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Shelburne?s former deputy mayor discusses transit at Mayor?s Fall Business Breakfast

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LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

Caledon Mayor Annette Groves is thinking big for the future in terms of transit ? and she wants to get businesses on board to invest in that future.

On Monday, Nov. 17, prominent business leaders from across Caledon and the broader region were invited to the Mayor's Fall Business Breakfast event hosted at Mount Alverno Luxury Resorts, just east of Orangeville.

The event was hosted by the office of Caledon Mayor Annette Groves, where guests were treated to a buffet breakfast, featuring everything from scrambled eggs to pastry desserts. The morning was an opportunity to gather influential people in the area, who pitched a bold new vision for Caledon's future.

That vision is for an overhauled transit system to accommodate a rapidly expanding, dispersed community. This plan for the future was supported by the morning's keynote speaker, Steve Anderson. He is an author and former deputy mayor of Shelburne, who was inspired by the stories he heard after entering politics.

?I remember being on Facebook one day, and I saw a post from a citizen looking for a ride to Orangeville to attend a medical event,? he said. ?Just imagine that, right? Feeling like it was necessary to go on Facebook to ask for a ride because there's no good transportation. Stories like this helped to fuel my desire for public transportation.?

He spoke at length about the possibilities of public transportation and challenged guests to think outside the box about affordability, one of several key points to factor into introducing and popularizing transit, starting with collaboration.

?Collaboration is key; there is a role for businesses in public transportation,? Anderson said. ?That's why we're here, right? Innovative transport solutions are driven by partnership with the private sector.?

He added that business leaders are being consulted to leverage their knowledge and expertise across society.

Anderson also pointed to examples from around the world to draw inspiration from. He said that buses aren't the only form of mass transit available. In Asia, small, self-driving shuttle cars are becoming increasingly common, offering direct transportation throughout their host cities, while leaving a small footprint and being affordable.

In Seoul, South Korea, autonomous buses are running nighttime shifts, so they can remain operational without the need for employees or drivers.

Anderson said integrating advanced technology will change the face of public transport, especially in rural areas.

?AI can apply to public transportation as well,? he remarked. ?AI optimizes traffic flow, predictive maintenance enhances safety, and reduces downtimes. Flexible transit, micro transit, and dynamic routing serves diverse populations in suburban and rural areas.?

Anderson said that the integration of technology will bring about a more inclusive Caledon, one that uses new technology to keep people moving without having large carbon footprints. He encouraged business leaders to work collaboratively with local government to invest in future transit programs that remain affordable and safe.

During Groves' remarks, she noted the significance of public transit as her community continues to grow.

?Caledon is a very unique place,? she said. ?We're bigger than the Cities of Brampton and Mississauga combined, we're bigger than the City of Toronto, geographically speaking. But we're 90,000 people. In 25 years or so, we're looking at becoming 300,000 people, and this is why public transportation is so important.?

She continued by saying that with such a large influx of residents moving into the region, jobs will follow, bringing new businesses and new industry connections to the community. The focus then shifts to ensuring all those businesses are staffed and that the staff have an easy commute to reach them.

?We will have to create 125,000 new jobs over the next 25 years,? she said. ?That means a lot of employers here, and that also means a lot of taxes to the Town of Caledon.?

Groves added, ?That means we need to be able to get those people to those jobs.?

She framed investing in public transit as an investment for future prosperity. Making transit accessible to Caledon allows greater freedom of movement for incoming residents, which, in turn, will attract more growth as the region can support greater movement of people. She described transit as a lifeline for residents who don't have many options.

?When we talk about transit, it's not just a bus,? she said. ?We have a long-term care home here, the Davis Centre, and many years ago, their bus broke down. I went out to the community, saying ?we need to help them afford a new bus,' and I said to the folks who donated to attend the Davis Centre to see how your money is going to help so many people.?

Groves continued, ?One lady at the centre spoke up, and she said the bus was their arms and legs, because many people there are in wheelchairs. They're not able to move around. They have mobility issues. I see public transit as our arms and legs. It keeps us moving. It keeps our economy moving.?

Groves said she hopes that by connecting with business leaders and innovators in the community, Caledon can plan a modern, clean, and cost-efficient transit program alongside businesses, hearing directly from them about ideas and feedback.

It's clear that Caledon has big plans for the future of the region, but this meeting was only the start of that plan. The pitch has been made to community business partners; time will now tell if it hooks. Plenty of work remains ahead for Groves, her team, and their business partners.