

Mayor gives 'state of the Town' address to business community

By Cynthia Gamble
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Mayor Rick Bonnette said Halton Hills is "moving forward" on economic, environment and societal fronts—including a possible twinning with a Chinese city—in his annual Christmas address to a sold-out audience of business leaders hosted by the Halton Hills Chamber last Thursday.

"Our goal is to live in a community with the highest possible quality of life," said the mayor. "We are continuing to create a community that is sustainable, active and prosperous... One we can be proud to call home."

Bonnette noted that more than 20 new businesses have opened in Halton Hills over the past year.

The mayor also highlighted a number of projects being developed in the Halton Hills Premier Gateway Business Park (401 Corridor).

"When these projects are completed the Premier Gateway will have over 4 million sq. ft. of commercial industrial buildings and be home to more than 3,000 jobs," said Bonnette.

They include:

- Brocolini Construction of Montreal is constructing a 630,000 sq. ft. building on the Fifth Line West and Steeles Ave. When it is completed in 2016, it will be the largest industrial building in Halton Hills — six times larger than the Real Canadian Superstore in Georgetown.

- In the planning process is the consolidation of Gino's Pizza's head office, including relocating its call centre from Cambridge, to Halton Hills, which will see approximately 75 people employed.

- Bentall Kennedy, a large real estate investment firm, is planning a new project with its first phase being a 700,000 sq. ft. building

- Triovest is also investing in a 500,000 sq. ft. industrial building

- First Gulf is constructing a 75,000 sq. ft. building on Brigden Gate.

In the Georgetown industrial area, small and large companies, such as EFCO and Unilock, are considering expansion.

Residentially, Town staff is reviewing plans for the redevelopment of the Memorial Arena site— and will consid-

er the plan at a special council meeting on Monday— and are in the process of selling the old Ambulance building site on Chapel St. and the Civic Centre surplus lands for residential projects. A public meeting will be held in early 2016 on the proposed redevelopment of the McGibbon Hotel into an 11-storey, 125-unit condo building.

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— Mayor Rick Bonnette —

The Town is also moving forward on its Vision Georgetown planning process that will see the development of 1,000-acre block bordered by Main St. S., Trafalgar Rd. and 10 and 15 Sideroad. It will become home to about 20,000 new residents by 2031.

The mayor expressed excitement about a possible twinning between the town and Chengdu City, China, a city of 15 million people. It is an economic powerhouse community with more than 230 of the Fortune Top 500 companies having a branch in the city. It is

also home to 40 universities and a giant panda breeding centre. The two pandas that currently reside in the Toronto Zoo came from Chengdu City.

The possibility arose this fall, after the mayor made a trade visit to China in September, which was followed up by two Chinese delegations to Halton Hills in October and November.

"While some may ask, 'Why is the mayor of a small town venturing to China?' The truth is, if I don't go, a mayor from another jurisdiction would and they would be selling the attributes of their community," Bonnette said.

Chengdu Vice Mayor Tian Rong suggested the twinning that would include business opportunities, student exchanges and tourism.

In return, the Town would provide its expertise on environmental and sustainability policies.

"We are going to seriously explore this proposal," said the mayor, asking the Chamber members for their contributions and promotion. "I can't predict where this may lead, however, it illustrates that a small town like ours can be recognized."

On the environmental front, the Town is implementing its Mayor's Community Energy Plan, designed to lead to better energy efficiency and lower greenhouse gas emissions. Through a Local Action Plan, the Town is targeting a 20 per cent reduction in total greenhouse gas emissions by its own facilities by 2019 and a 35 per cent reduction in per capita greenhouse gas emissions by 2031. Two actions that will contribute to the end goal was the retrofitting of the Town's 4,500 streetlights to LED lights, and the installation of 1,850 solar panels on the roof of the Mold-Masters SportsPlex.

The Town will also be pressing the upper governments on infrastructure funding, particularly relating to roads such as a possible Acton bypass and the long awaited Norval bypass and all-day/two-way GO service.

"While on one hand, we think big through trade missions to China, we never lose sight of the fact that people value that small town feel," said Bonnette. "And we will continue to walk the balance beam to ensure our residents can enjoy the best of both worlds."

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