

MORE SUPPORT FOR LOCAL BUSINESSES NEEDED: OWNERS

Continued from page 1

transit upgrades, employment growth, development of a waterpark, an entertainment complex, a new hotel and more — while fostering "small town living at its best."

"Our responsibility as a local government is to create an environment where people thrive — a place that is realized through a healthy, prosperous, diverse, welcoming and equitable community," said Lawlor.

Regional Coun. Clark Somerville emphasized the ongoing importance of promoting business development, saying, "We need to look forward to continued recovery from COVID-19 and to make sure we're there for our businesses and community groups."

Municipal funding to hire students for summer jobs and increased support for Business Improvement Area (BIA) events bringing in significant foot traffic would help the business community thrive, said Georgetown's Dirty Adventures Scuba manager Heidi Gay.

Mumbai Frankie, owner Chandra Kumar, who opened the Georgetown restaurant earlier this year, said municipal support for advertising, staff training and grants to accelerate business growth would be beneficial.

In response to the pandemic, the town initiated the Digital Main Street Program, providing personalized digital support to businesses looking to launch or expand their e-commerce capabilities — funding will continue until the end of 2023.

The town also aims to contin-



Ann Lawlor photo
Mayor Ann Lawlor says a wide variety of projects are planned for the town in 2023.

ue collaboration on several other projects, including the Shop Local campaign and the ongoing Community Improvement Plan (CIP), which has generated about \$1.4 million in CIP-related investments to date.

Limited access to public transit is another challenge facing local businesses that Lawlor says the town is working on improving.

With four out of Mumbai Frankie's eight employees from out of town, Kumar said he "initially faced many challenges finding staff due to lack of public transit."

After a three-month delay in opening the business due to staff-

ing shortages, Kumar said he had no option but to offer his employees free-of-cost housing at a walkable distance from the restaurant.

Brampton's Pooja Sandhu, who takes the GO bus to Georgetown for work, said the service is expensive and limited to an hourly basis.

"Sometimes they can't even get you on the bus because there's no space, and I have to wait until the next bus in the cold weather ... the bus stops don't even have a stand," said Sandhu.

Through a transit system/master plan launched in September, Lawlor said the town sees a Milton bus travel along the Steeles Avenue corridor.

Somerville sees this as the new main employment area that will see the vast majority of job growth.

"The Steeles route has been an immediate success," said Lawlor. "By using Milton buses and drivers, we don't manage that investment. We only pay a set amount to Milton to extend their route through Halton Hills," she added.

Lawlor said the initial foray into transit beyond the Activan program would assist the town's existing and new businesses in the employment corridor in securing and retaining employees. Additional office, logistics and warehouse sites are also planned for the Steeles corridor.

Residents also shared concerns about what they feel is insufficient housing availability and affordability for the next generation and those looking to move to Halton Hills.

"In my neighbourhood, as

soon as a house goes for sale, it's bought.

"So, I don't think we have enough space right now," said Shania Rios, who's been living in Georgetown with her parents for about seven years.

Rios said that while she enjoys being part of the community, buying a home alone here is just not feasible.

There're several residential projects on the horizon for next year. Lawlor said two condominium buildings of 640 units are proposed near the Georgetown GO Station, and the construction of a 10-storey building at the McGibbon on Main site is expected to start in the spring of next year.

Lawlor added that a six-storey building on the former Memorial Arena lands will be completed by summer 2023, followed by the construction of 14 townhouse units and a five-storey condominium with 114 units later next year. Somerville said council will also look into housing options for seniors.

"There are about four million square feet of development proceeding through the development review process or actually under construction. These projects represent about \$900 million in investment and over 2,000 local jobs," said Lawlor.

Following a recommendation report targeted for mid-2023, the town will also see movement in significant development projects, including a waterpark, entertainment complex and a hotel.

While the town would benefit from the expansion of transit services, residential spaces and job availabilities, Ruth Rocheleau, a

Georgetown resident for about two decades, said she fears the development would compromise the area's "country-like lifestyle."

"We don't want the urban sprawl. It's a sleepy little hollow that wants to stay this way," she said.

Managing growth — Lawlor said — will be one of the major challenges faced by the new council.

"I will work hard to ensure that the new neighbourhoods that we create reinforce our character; that we avoid sprawl and the geography of nowhere," Lawlor said.

Lawlor recognized financial pressures — due to inflation and non-discretionary cost increases such as insurance premiums — on the budget as a critical challenge.

"A second challenge is an upheaval due to new and unfolding regulations dictated by the province," Lawlor said. "Several pieces of new legislation and regulation, including the so-called More Homes Built Faster Act, threatens citizen participation, years of planning processes, natural heritage protection, climate action and heritage preservation," she added.

"We will be working with our municipal partners to raise our concerns about the impacts of this legislation," said Lawlor, looking ahead to an eventful year.

STORY BEHIND THE STORY: With 2023 just around the corner, we wanted to share what residents and elected officials see as the top priorities for the new year.



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*Have a Wonderful Christmas Season
and a Safe and Happy New Year!*

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