

Poor turnout at meeting to discuss future of core

By MELANIE CUMMINGS
Special to The Champion

The future of downtown Milton will suffer unless more retailers and residents participate in developing it.

That was the consensus at Wednesday's Heritage Milton meeting to discuss improvements to the town's core.

Councillor John Challinor said he was disappointed by the poor turnout at the meeting.

Only 40 interested retailers and Town representatives showed up at the Lions Club Hall, even though Milton's planning department sent out 300 invitations.

"I'm not happy with the poor attendance this evening," said Mr. Challinor. "If we want to see change, people are going to have to get involved."

He promised to revive the annual gatherings. It had been four years since the last meeting.

Mr. Challinor called on those who did show up to talk with other downtown merchants and take a

leadership role in creating a more vibrant core.

Jeff Bergsma is one such example. He bought the commercial buildings at 194-196 Main St., where the former BiWay stood, and after two months of hard work, refurbished the buildings to their former 1920s-era glory.

Mr. Bergsma owns the Benjamin Moore paint store and Main Street Lighting.

"In business, you are what you look like. My renovation has helped raise the bar among downtown shoppers and customers respect that effort," said Mr. Bergsma.

Business is up as a result of his renovation, and the talk created by the work while it was in progress attracted interest among local consumers too, he added.

To that end, Richard Talbot of Talbot Consultants International had many practical suggestions for retailers.

Based on Mr. Talbot's successful revitalization of Unionville, he

called for more pleasure shops, instead of 'chore' stores in downtown Milton, as well as a balance among retail and restaurants.

The key is to have people heading downtown day and night.

"You only have to recapture 5 per cent of the money that is already flowing out to turn around the downtown core," said Mr. Talbot.

He feared that if a made-in-Milton solution isn't found, developers might come in and build their own version of the core.

"Work together. Residents and commercial groups should be formed and with a concerted effort to town council, improvement is imminent downtown."

Parking is a start. According to Mel Iovio, planning and development director for the Town, studies indicate there's enough parking in the town centre — it's just in all the wrong spots.

Nonetheless, he too sees "significant excitement in the near future for downtown."

Aboriginal council pickets Reed

Members of the Aboriginal People's Council of Toronto picketed peacefully out front of Liberal MP Julian Reed's Martin Street constituency office for about four hours Friday to denounce potential legislation — Bills C-6, C-7 and C-19 — that its says would erode native's right to self-governance.

The group chose Mr. Reed's office because he's one of nine Liberal MPs who sit on the standing committee of Aboriginal Affairs.

The group plans to picket outside all of the committee member's constituency offices to spread its message.



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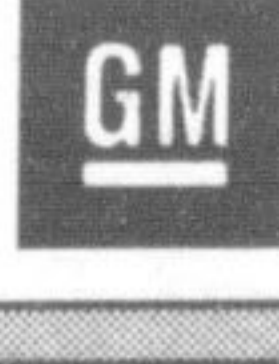
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