

Milton council renews Town support for satellite campus

By Michael Gregory
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

The Town has assured Wilfrid Laurier University that a future satellite campus has strong support from the community as the post-secondary school prepares to take its pitch to the provincial government.

On Monday, council unanimously approved the extension of a memorandum of understanding between the Town and Laurier. The document formally outlines the mutual interest in building a 150-acre campus on Tremaine Road between Derry and Britannia roads.

The agreement was first adopted in 2008, when the two parties began discussing the possibility of a campus with classroom views overlooking the escarpment.

Last week the Province issued a request for proposal (RFP) from colleges and universities interested in building satellite campuses.

Laurier University President Max Blouw appeared before council on Monday to express the university's commitment in seeking the Milton campus through to fulfillment.

"We've had an opportunity for some time to develop a proposal but we now have a formal process that Premier (Kathleen) Wynne has announced (last week)," Blouw said. "We have a letter of intent that we'll be submitting very quickly."

During the 2011 provincial election, the Liberals under former premier Dalton McGuinty promised funding for three new satellite campuses.

The government now says it will fund as many satellites and site expansions as needed to meet the needs of growing post-secondary enrollment.

In announcing last week's RFP, the Wynne government outlined its expectations of applicants, including: increased post-secondary spaces in underserved areas, improved quality, innovation and competitiveness, demonstrated cost-effectiveness to both students

and taxpayers, and economic growth and innovation in Ontario's economy.

"We've carefully gone through the requirements," Blouw said. "We feel that we can do an extraordinarily good job not only making a compelling case, but having a compelling case with strong evidence to back it up."

The Province floated the idea last December that it would be requesting RFPs from prospective applicants in the near future.

Blouw had appeared before council that same month and said pending approval, classes at a new Milton campus could begin as early as fall of 2014.

Soft opening likely pushed back year

Responding to a question from Councillor Cindy Lunau on Monday, the Laurier president said a soft opening for the campus would likely be pushed back a year because of the September deadline for the RFP submission.

"What we have always indicated is that as soon as we have a green light to signal that the provincial government would support this project, we would then begin immediately to plan activity here in the community," Blouw said. "Depending on the decision timeline, a year from September certainly is a possibility."

University classes would be held at the Milton Education Village Innovation Centre prior to the future opening of the Milton Education Village on Tremaine Road — also the site of the new Mattamy National Cycling Centre. Councillor Mike Cluett said he welcomed news that the process was finally moving forward and assured the university president of the Town's backing.

"We're here 100 per cent to support it," Cluett said. "We're looking forward to the potential jobs, the investment and the growth of a more complete community here in Milton."

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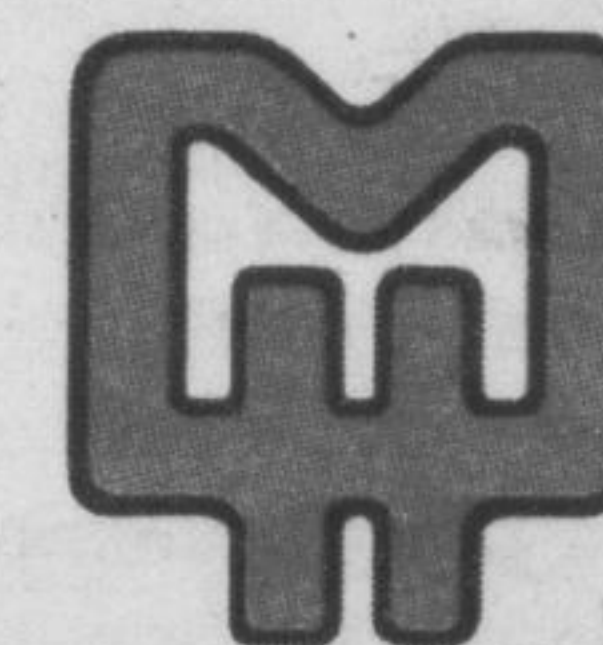
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