

Bridge forum raises arguments – for and against

BY ANDY COMBER

A plan by the Ambassador Bridge Company to build a second span across the Detroit River produced both praise and scorn at a public consultation meeting in Essex, April 19.

"It provides a secure, dependable, and redundant infrastructure," said Paula Lombardi, a municipal and environmental lawyer, who presented the case for a proposed six-lane "cable stayed" span to be built adjacent to the existing suspension bridge.

"The enhancement project takes traffic off the Ambassador Bridge and puts it on the new structure," said Lombardi, noting that the new bridge would take over from the old structure.

"It will result in no impact to traffic," she said.

Although the Essex meeting was the only forum held outside the city of Windsor, the audience of about 25 people was made up primarily of residents from the Windsor area, including LaSalle. Of those attending, residents close to the new bridge site voiced opposition to the plan, while those living further away generally supported the project.



LaSalle resident Anna Lynn Meloche and Sandwich resident Terrence Kennedy voice strong objections to a plan to build a new bridge adjacent to the Ambassador Bridge, at a public forum held in Essex April 19.

"It makes sense to me," said Paula Cazabon, an Essex resident who travels across the bridge at least three times a week to work at the duty free store on the U.S. side of the border.

Cazabon said traffic has flowed relatively smoothly across the bridge in recent months, taking her just over a half an hour to make the trip from Essex, but a new structure is needed to

replace the existing bridge that was opened in 1929.

Those living in the shadow of the proposed bridge, however, held a much different opinion of the plan.

"It is very confusing," said Terrence Kennedy, a west-end Windsor resident who has spent all of his 49 years in historic Sandwich Towne and is a vocal critic of the Ambassador Bridge plan.

"We are going to end up with three bridges unless we can come up with a proper solution," said Kennedy, who pointed to the Detroit River International Crossing Study (DRIC), which is proposing a separate government-funded span on the west side of Sandwich.

Kennedy claimed that the increase in traffic concentrated along the corridor to the bridge would result in health costs in the billions of dollars.

"We already have the highest level of cancer," Kennedy said, noting that his neighbours were "galvanized like never before" in their opposition to the doubling of the existing bridge.

Residing further away from the bridge, other Windsor residents felt the new bridge was necessary and, with its enhanced customs plazas, would move the traffic more quickly resulting in fewer idling trucks and less pollution.

"I am all for it," said Ricardo Vidal, an east-end Windsor resident, who is in favour of building a second span as quickly as possible to support the business and industry of the region.

"We are losing factories," Vidal said, "This will be moving the trucks fast."

Stage set for local economic summit - this Saturday

BY ANDY COMBER

A new economic development group will collect ideas from community stakeholders at a summit to be held at the Canadian Transportation Museum and Historic Village on Arner Townline April 28.

Described as a "brainstorming session" - the summit is the first event hosted by the Shores of Essex Resource Corporation (SOERC), a new organization that plans to provide strategic direction for economic development and tourism for the communities of Essex and encourage business retention, expansion and attraction.

"We are going to be listening to everyone and gathering their input," said Paul Foster, an Essex accountant and SOERC director, speaking about the conference.

"We are trying to invite all the stakeholders," said Foster, noting that attendees will represent a broad spectrum of interests, including service organizations, historic and conservation groups, and economic development officers or town planners from area municipalities.

"We don't wish to assume what the stakeholders want, it is better to ask them. What will we learn? It is what we don't know - it is what will surprise us," he said.

Foster said the energy and enthusiasm of the group has encouraged the community to get involved in the initiative.

"The goal is to take action," said Foster, who stressed the importance of networking and working in partnership to help define the region.

"We encourage working together as a team," he said.

Special guest speakers at the summit will be Matthew Fischer, CEO of the Windsor-Essex Development Commission, and Gordon Orr, managing director of the Convention and Visitors Bureau.

SOERC president Bill Baker said attendees would be divided into separate groups following the presentations and then be brought back together to share their ideas in a workshop session facilitated by Hargreaves Mandal Stewart Inc.

"It is a proven method," said Baker, who also noted that the workshops will not include local municipal leaders or other politicians who will be invited to the networking luncheon, wine tasting and museum tour.

At their last regular meet-

ing, members of Essex Town Council were advised of the exclusion of politics from the workshop sessions. Essex Mayor Ron McDermott will, however, officially open the summit.

Directors from SOERC told council that politicians were not being invited to the workshops to encourage attendees to "talk freely" about their ideas for the community and region.

SOERC secured the endorsement of Essex Town Council in February, following their introduction at a special economic development meeting with private sector stakeholders, including members from the Harrow Chamber of Commerce and Essex Business Improvement Area.

For information, call 519-791-3261 or visit www.soerc.com.

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