



COURTESY COREBRIDGE DEVELOPMENT CORP

The interior and exterior plans for a trading centre at what was the Southwire plant on Main Street in Stouffville.

MP opposes trade centre, mayor-elect awaits meeting

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Management Ltd. and Corebridge.

Mayor-elect Justin Altmann's June YouTube video claimed 400 trucks a day will come down Main Street to the trade centre.

"I don't know where that's coming from," Chan said this week during an interview held at the trade centre's sales office on Hwy. 7.

The only vehicles that will go in and out of it will be those driven by staff and buyers.

But just how many vehicles could potentially make or break the project, according to McNeely.

Among the numerous studies Corebridge executives have yet to provide the town is one on traffic impact, which will assess everything from vehicle type, volume, movements per hour, duration and business operation.

Just because the project conforms to zoning bylaws, "it doesn't mean it's right for the property," McNeely said.

The plan is to have the trade centre open next September, according to Chan. However, the town has yet to receive a number of technical studies and drawings they have requested and that are required.

Once all necessary reports from Corebridge have been received, public consultation will take place. Only once those are complete, will town staff submit a report to council with its recommendations, McNeely said.

The municipality does not impose deadlines for these reports, he added.

The trade centre is a glorified office building, according to Chan. It will be open 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday to Friday.

Along with \$1 million in taxes from the facility, Chan has always said there will be local spin-off benefits for current retailers and the project will help draw other companies

to the municipality.

Among services to be required by businesses of the trade centre are logistics, IT, e-commerce, warehousing, advertising, business consulting, financing, legal and accounting, he says.

Paul Calandra, MP for Oak Ridge-Markham, disagrees.

In a Nov. 2 Facebook post, the Stouffville resident explained why he opposes the trade centre.

In part he wrote: "(it) will negatively impact the town's ability to attract new businesses."

The trade centre is not open to the general public, however, its plan includes a name-brand café, which will be accessible to everyone. A nail salon and spa is also confirmed. It, too, will be open to the public. Negotiations are still underway for a second restaurant that will be accessible to the general public, according to Chan. A nearby hotel may be in the works.

Why Stouffville and why the former cable wire company's building?

About a year ago, a delegation from China came to Whitchurch-Stouffville to assess its feasibility for the trade centre, which will serve as a North American satellite office, Chan said.

"It is not an attempt to bring something that did not already exist in the current market, albeit it will now be under one roof where international buyers/retailers can have the convenience, access, time savings and cost reduction that could potentially be passed through to end users/purchasers," Chan told The Sun-Tribune via email.

The project is part of economic progress, Wilson Tran, director of the trade centre told The Sun-Tribune via an interpreter this week.

He noted York Region's growth in population – it's more than 1.1 million – enables industries to set up shop here.

In the past 10 years, the prevalence of big box stores has grown

because they are able to find cheaper supply chain sources, versus the mom and pop shops, Tran said through a translator.

This trade centre, Tran said, will also provide local retailers access to those same suppliers.

The trade centre is not open to the general public, however, part of its plan includes a name-brand café, which will be accessible to everyone.

The developers are aware of the uproar this project has caused within the community.

"That's the reality of real estate development in general," Chan said.

The executives were invited to Mayor Wayne Emmerson's hastily called press conference Oct. 22 but did not have time to attend, they told The Sun-Tribune this week.

Instead of speaking publicly to clarify untruths or diffuse issues, they have chosen to focus on the project.

"We're trying to do our best for the site," Chan said.

Corebridge's lack of communication is what councillor-elect for Ward 4 Rick Upton has a hard time coping with. The trade centre is in his ward.

While on the campaign trail, information about the trade centre felt like a "secret club" and no one was clear regarding exactly what was going to be constructed in the west-end, he told The Sun-Tribune this week.

Once it was finally confirmed it would not be a Pacific Mall, he favoured it.

"Overall, I don't think it's a bad thing," he said. However, he doesn't

think the location is the best.

Once all of the studies are provided to town staff and public meetings have been held and if his constituents do not favour the trade centre, Upton will vote according to their wishes, he said.

Upton is also a director and the vice-chairperson of the Whitchurch-Stouffville Chamber of Commerce.

Speaking strictly from a chamber perspective, he said the project is good because of the spin-off impacts available to local businesses.

Altmann has never met with Corebridge executives but scheduling a meeting is in the works.

"(I want a) full debriefing on exactly what is going on," he told The Sun-Tribune this week, adding he would not comment further until then.

Throughout his campaign for mayor, however, Altmann was very vocal against the trade centre moving into the vacated Southwire building. He prefers it be constructed in Gormley.

In his 1:05-minute long YouTube video from June, Altmann called the project an "all-Asian trade centre."

Corebridge executives are aware of Altmann's YouTube video and, via an interpreter, Tran said he understands everyone has a strategy when it comes to election campaigns and he trusts people will come up with their own opinions.

It is not an "all-Asian trade centre," according to Tran and Chan.

Roughly 40 per cent of the more than 800 units are already sold – to North American companies.

The number of vendors will be less than 800 as some have purchased multiple units.

Calandra noted in his Facebook post he was approached with a request to facilitate the approval of hundreds of foreign workers "to open and operate the trade centre." He did not name who approached him.

It was not Corebridge, according to Chan.

"For clarity, we did not meet with Mr. Paul Calandra nor did we make a request directly to him on the matter. Rather we had written a letter earlier ... to the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville with regards to the potential of the project and discussed factors that impact the project," Chan told The Sun-Tribune via email.

Calandra confirmed yesterday he was forwarded a letter by Emmerson.

It is the understanding of Corebridge, from its purchasers, that a work permit offers important differences compared to a VISA, which grants entry into Canada.

The type of work permit for business owners, who are the ones requesting them, do not require a Labour Market Impact Assessment because they are not competing with the Canadian labour force, Chan told The Sun-Tribune via email.

Company executives require the ability to enter Canada a few times a year to check on their business, which will be run by locally hired employees, Chan said.

FACEBOOK NON-FANS

It appears MP Paul Calandra's Facebook post struck a chord with people.

One person wrote: "What a shame.... This will destroy what was a lovely town...."

One person called it "disgusting" and added it was "time to move."

Another poster claimed the wholesale trade centre was originally going to be in Vaughan but it "was smart enough to turn this opportunity down."

This trade centre, according to Corebridge executives, was never planned for Vaughan.

There is a project in the Hwy. 407 and Keele Street area called IMPROVE, but its focus is on home improvement materials only. It is not something Corebridge has ever been involved with, Chan said.