

Alton Village Study
Community Design Workshop
Summary Report

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Prepare by:
MMM Group Limited

Alton Village Study

Community Design Workshop

On February 12, 2009 the Town of Caledon hosted a Community Design Workshop for the Village of Alton at the Alton Legion. The session began at 6pm, with introductions by Ben Roberts, Project Manager for the Town of Caledon, and Loren Polonsky of MMM Group.

Introductory presentations were made by three local business stakeholders, representatives from the Alton Village Association, and Norman Hibbert, the project's community designer from MMM Group.

After the short presentations, the approximately 70 workshop attendees were invited to form several small working groups, and discuss a series of topics that had been identified in the April 2006 document "A Community Vision for the Village of Alton", prepared by Maurice Nellischer, University of Guelph, for the Alton Residents Study Group. Each group was also tasked with developing a vision statement for Alton. A summary of the discussions is provided below.

Queen Street 'Historic District'

Groups generally agreed that the boundary of the 'historic district' should extend beyond Queen Street. There was a suggestion that the historic district should include the entire old section of the village, and another suggestion that the historic district is generally the two main streets, including all houses/buildings built before 1920, particularly the school building. Participants asked what implications there are in calling an area historic, and if property owners would be restricted in any way. There should be heritage plaques for significant sites. All existing buildings on Queen Street are important.

Residents would like to see more commercial development in the core of Alton, and see the empty shops in use again. Uses in the historic district should include independent and unique stores such as artisan shops, as well as services such as butcher or produce shops. A small grocery store could also be introduced to the community. It was expressed that there should be no chain stores, large-scale stores or malls. The commercial area should be enhanced to promote the existing historic scale, and include trees and landscaping.

Residents acknowledge that parking is required to serve the businesses on Queen Street. Parking could be placed next to the Palmer Hotel, introduced at the Carriage Works site, or added along Victoria Street. There should be no parking along the residential section of Queen Street. There is an interest in expanding parking at the Alton Mill. Guests could use this parking lot, and walk around the village. Proper signage would be required to direct guests to the parking area.

Entrances to Alton need improvement. There should be signs directing people to the business district.

The Village Green

The participating groups suggested a variety of uses for a 'Village Green' site, and had differing opinions on where the Village Green site should be.

One option for the Village Green is the former Carriage Works site. It was suggested that a land survey of the site is required to determine the actual site boundary and ownership. Maintaining public ownership is a high priority for this property. If this site were chosen, there should be some parking provided on-site or adjacent to the site on Victoria Street.

Other suggested sites for the Village Green include the school/library area, the parkette beside the water, and the north-west corner of Queen and Main Streets. Some feel the Carriage Works site is not large enough, and that site should instead have a new building to match the surrounding buildings. Infill development should look/feel like the historic part of the village.

Regardless of site, suggested uses for a Village Green could be a gathering area, skating rink, band stand/gazebo. The area could host events such as a farmers market, or a wine sampling day.

Main Street and Queen Street East of Intersection

The uses in the area should be commercial, but some people suggest that existing houses should not be converted into businesses. Encourage new businesses in Alton that locals would use, such as medical services or others that would support seniors.

At the Main Street and Queen Street intersection, the roadway design should be changed to impede gravel trucks from using Regional Road 136. It was suggested that it should be a 'No Truck' route from the gravel pit south to Alton. Traffic should be encouraged to slow down. Traffic calming measures should be

introduced, as well as some visual amenities including trees, signposts, and historic lights.

The character of Alton should be apparent when entering the village. Currently, there is too much asphalt. The entrances should have more trees and greenery, and main streets should be lined with benches and sitting areas to create appeal. There should also be garbage receptacles. Along the roads, there should be no modern curbs. A view of the river, signage and murals would help add character to the area.

Recreation and Community Facilities

Workshop participants expressed interest in preserving the school and library. There was a question about ownership of the old town hall, and a comment that it should fall under public ownership.

Facilities and services that community members would like to see introduced include:

- A pool
- Arena
- Tennis courts
- Basketball courts
- Bocce courts
- Shuffleboard
- Community Theatre
- Recreational programs and activities, particularly for seniors and teens
- Trail connections to the Grange property
- Trails connecting areas through Alton, with appropriate signage
- Soccer fields
- Additional parks

New recreational facilities could be located near the existing school and library, and be available for Alton students to use.

River and Pond Accessibility

The groups presented a number of different ideas and concerns about Alton's river and pond. There was some concern regarding flooding through the use of a dam. Wildlife, especially birds, are often found in the pond area, and will be impacted if water level is raised. The existing dam is old and needs to be replaced.

River and pond accessibility is critical to Alton's unique character. Views of the river and pond should also be promoted. In terms of uses, swimming and non-motorized boating during the summer, and skating during the winter should be allowed. The appearance between Queen Street and the pond should be improved, and could include a trail connecting to the river and pond. The trail should be wheelchair accessible. Monitoring responsibility of activities and jurisdiction needs to be determined.

Reconnection to the Train

While most groups agreed that train service would be welcome in Alton, it was not identified as a top priority. Groups suggested that service should be restored at the previous station location, or behind the school on Station Street. The new station could also include other uses. A rail stop on the existing connection between Orangeville and Brampton should serve to help draw tourists to the area. Commuter train service, including a connection to Brampton's GO station would be welcomed by locals. The link between train service and hiking should also be explored.

New Housing

Workshop participants had much to say about new housing in Alton. Most groups expressed an interest in maintaining and promoting a mix of housing styles, facades and sizes, and wanted to see affordable, pedestrian-oriented, full life-cycle housing provided, including townhouses and low rise condos. High density development is not encouraged. New housing developments should not include gated communities or 'monster' homes. There should also be policies that limit the footprint of new housing, requiring a certain percentage of green space.

A few groups expressed interest in one of the development options proposed by Jerry Humeniuk (Plan D). They suggested this Plan be located on the Thomas Farm property instead of the proposed sites outside of the current village boundary. Many residents do not wish to see the current settlement boundary expanded. Groups suggested the seniors/artisan theme be maintained on the Thomas Farm property.

New housing developments should use minimal street lighting, and should maintain the historic grid pattern, leaving room for community areas and facilities. New developments should provide linkages to existing trails and footpaths, and common green spaces.

The development proposed for the Thomas Farm property is draft approved on private septic systems (i.e. without sewers). When sewers are in place in Alton, it will be possible to develop other sites, such as Robb Farm. No more housing should be proposed or approved until the sewer situation is resolved.

Vision Statements

The six different Vision Statements developed by workshop attendees are:

- Balance protection of natural environment and village heritage and character with sustainable growth to make Alton a destination of choice.
- Build on existing strengths encompassing authentic heritage, natural assets and amenities creating a sustainable, vibrant, complete community.
- A village anchored by the principles of environmental sustainability and community stewardship that reflects the charm of the village and its historic community roots.
- Alton will be a safe, inclusive, quaint and green small village where people can live, work and play.
- A thriving community with a viable economy that provides for its residents and preserves and protects its environment and history while welcoming its future.
- On its 200th birthday, Alton will be a vibrant community where people can live in peace and prosperity from cradle to grave in a natural environment that builds on its heritage.

Preliminary Community Design Principles

Following the small group discussion, participants reconvened to share feedback and engage in a discussion on the Preliminary Community Design Principles, which Council received in January, 2009.

A participant asked about the scope of the planning process, noting that a housing development proposal shared at the meeting extends beyond the existing village settlement boundary. He asked if residents can comment on what happens outside of the existing boundary. Norman Hibbert replied that the proposed plan is not an official submission yet. At some point, there will be

an official application with a public process, and residents can provide comments then.

Councillor Richard Paterak stated that this is a Secondary Plan process. A potential village boundary expansion has always been considered, but that does not mean it will happen.

A participant stated that the word 'commercial' should appear in Principle #2 regarding land use. Another resident suggested clarifying the type of commercial that would be permitted.

Principle # 4 regarding lot development should include the word 'diverse'.

Principle #5 should be more specific, and should read "the" rural village instead of "a" rural village.

In Principle #6, the vision should explore alternative ways of solving problems, such as included LEED standards.

The workshop concluded shortly after 9pm. Participants were invited to submit further comments, included comments on the Preliminary Community Design Principles to the project team until February 26, 2009.