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Peterborough Mayor Jeff Leal wants to open up Cleantech Commons to more uses

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Mayor Jeff Leal said Monday he's spoken with an official at Trent University about potentially amending the criteria for startups to locate at Cleantech Commons and that "those discussions were very productive."

For example, Leal said he suggested that electric vehicles could potentially be built there.

"Even though they wouldn't be research-oriented, they would be a clean operation," he said.

At a committee meeting Monday night, Peterborough and the Kawartha Economic Development president and CEO Rhonda Keenan was giving a regular update to council.

She said it's been challenging to bring businesses to Peterborough because the area lacks people to work at new enterprises, as well as serviced industrial land for large businesses to relocate here.

But Leal said during budget talks last week that Cleantech Commons, the 85-acre planned research and green

technology park on the Trent campus on Pioneer Road, might be the answer to the city's lack of serviced lands.

And on Monday, he suggested it to Keenan.

Leal also said Monday he's spoken in recent days with Julie Davis, the university's vice-president of external relations and development, about loosening the criteria to have businesses locate in the park.

The idea has been for environmentally friendly technology startups to come to Cleantech Commons.

But Leal said he talked to Davis about opening up the park to businesses in areas such as food processing, for example; he said these types of opportunities could help, since they don't appear to have any tenants yet.

Cleantech Commons is being developed by Trent in partnership with the city.

The municipality has already contributed about \$6 million toward servicing the park and rebuilding Pioneer Road.

Peterborough Mayor Jeff Leal said Monday he's spoken with an official at Trent University about potentially amending the criteria for startups to locate at Cleantech Commons and that "those discussions were very productive."

"If you've got inquiries (from prospective businesses willing to locate here), there could be an opportunity up there (at Cleantech Commons)," Leal told Keenan. "We've put in a lot of money to service it. We need to get a return on our investment."

But Keenan said she doesn't think she'll have trouble filling the park.

"There are a number of businesses that have expressed an interest" in locating there, she said, and although they've taken "baby steps" toward it so far, she expects "good news" to be announced once there are buildings constructed in Cleantech Commons.

Meanwhile Coun. Matthew Crowley asked about a proposal from Via Rail to introduce a high-frequency passenger train service between Toronto and Quebec City, with a stop in Peterborough.

The federal government has said it aims to have this project done by 2030 and that the next step is to narrow down a list of 54 prospective contractors by this spring.

“We certainly support the Via Rail high-frequency rail (proposal),” Keenan said on Monday.

“There were many years of support of campaigning and advocacy work (toward it)... Any opportunity to move people and products are always welcome.”

Via Rail passenger service to Peterborough was halted in the early 1990s.

The Via Rail high-frequency proposal was made in 2019, allowing for more service in the Toronto-Ottawa-Montreal-Quebec City corridor by using a dedicated line, six years after the Shining Water Railway proposal to run trains between Peterborough and Toronto stalled.

Coun. Alex Bierk said the project has been in the works for too many years already.

“I’ve been hearing about Via Rail coming to Peterborough ever since I’ve been alive,” he told Keenan. “It always seems to come back in the news, every four years. Hey — it’s happening! And then it never happens.”

“Do you see it happening?” Bierk asked Keenan.

“I can’t really speak for Via,” Keenan responded. “However I know large infrastructure projects like this happen in a series of steps. I think every time there’s an announcement, we’re one step closer. But it still needs more work.”

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