

Greenest Town in Ontario?

by SHERALYN ROMAN

Proudly noted on at least one 'Welcome to Caledon' sign are the words 'Greenest Town in Ontario Winner.'

We have won, and/or been in the running for this title a few times. In January of 2020, our Council declared a climate emergency recognizing the need to address climate change urgently with strategies that would 'significantly contribute to the Town's ability to cope with and address climate change.'

Additionally, we have a thriving tourism industry that, in my opinion, thrives in part because of the access we offer to the greenbelt, the Oak Ridges Moraine and the Niagara escarpment. The Town is even listed as an Ambassador of the 'Partners in Project Green' initiative, committed to helping like-minded businesses explore sustainability strategies and share best practices while collaborating on green business practices for the benefit of all. In other words, we seem to be focussed on maintaining our winning, environmentally friendly title. But are we really? With the not-so-surprising announcement last week that the building of both the #413 and the Bradford Bypass will commence sooner than later, I can't help but wonder how much longer we'll be in the running for 'Greenest town in Ontario' when the only thing green in Caledon will be the overhead highway signs announcing the next exit.

I've only written in the vaguest of terms on this topic before because even though I'm angry, I have a great deal of respect and admiration for many of the folks who will, in all likelihood, disagree with me entirely. However, when one is challenged with the responsibility of acting for the greater good - as elected municipal, regional and provincial officials are - one assumes they have come to expect both support and disagreement so I'm sure one little opinion piece that asks the question of whether the #413 serves the greater good, written in our local paper, probably won't garner much attention. Oh that it would though. If only some well-meaning, reasonably literate local writer could wield some 'common sense' influence over billion dollar projects. But wait. She did once. Working with then councillor Allan Thompson to make much needed changes to a poorly designed highway off ramp. So 'perchance to dream, she writes again.*

Two years into a crushing pandemic that has stifled small businesses who rely on local traffic, and not the large conglomerates who will utilize a highway, we think building highway is a good idea. Seemingly having learned nothing about the whole scope of working from home - therefore fewer people commuting - we think building a highway 'for commuters' is a good idea. Hot off the heels of a global summit addressing a climate emergency, we think building a highway is a good idea. You get the picture. Instead of a focus on greener initiatives like transit, we're committing to building a multi-lane highway that runs exactly parallel to an already existing and underutilized highway just a few kilometres south of it.

That highway (the 407) is beautiful, expansive, has many, many lanes and despite using it often to drive to Hamilton over the past five years, (and at a variety of times of both day and night) not once have I ever experienced even the merest hint of a traffic jam. I haven't even seen 'heavy' traffic on it and some days I even wonder were I to break down on it, would I even be found? It too was a road that paved over environmentally sensitive lands, farm fields and more - BUT IT IS ALREADY BUILT. The damage is done, so why aren't we using it? Oh yeah - we sold it and now it's a toll road.

Call me crazy but the 407 runs east/west, as does the proposed 413. The 407 run is over 150km long and could facilitate truck traffic from Pickering all the way to Milton and the 401 in the west as well as Hamilton, the QEW and the 403. The proposed 413 is only 59 km long and dead ends in Milton where the 401, 407 and 413 will converge. It offers no easy access to areas like Hamilton or Burlington. It is, frankly, 59km of redundant roadway and common sense dictates that the government would be much better served eliminating or reducing tolls for truck traffic and designating truck lanes all along the 407 rather than spending billions on a new highway.

As for our designation as the greenest town, I fail to see how we'll ever be able to claim that title again when we are willing to pave over sensitive wetlands; 2000 acres of greenbelt, farmland that feeds us, and on land which lays at the intersection of four significant

watersheds. It will add an estimated 17 million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions at a pivotal moment in history. Who knows what the true long-term environmental impact of building this road will actually be. Species lost, eco-systems interrupted, small businesses ruined as drivers bypass their storefronts and tourism? Why would anyone come to Caledon for the ambience, scenery and pleasant vistas when they no longer exist or you have to leapfrog over a concrete wasteland to get to them?

Common sense would also suggest that if we are currently experiencing a dearth of public transit availability and we apparently have \$6 billion dollars to spend, we could rectify that in a heartbeat by improving bus and train service and adding more transit routes and hubs to local communities. If the government (as they appear to be) is using the logic 'if you build it they will come' to justify building a highway ? doesn't that same logic apply to transit? Especially at a time when post-pandemic, more and more people are choosing to drastically change their lifestyle, often meaning a reduction in the need for commuting to work?

Perhaps a word needs to be added to the signs seen as you enter Caledon. The word is 'Formerly,' as in 'Formerly the Greenest Town in Ontario,' but not for much longer.

*Others were involved too, by no means am I suggesting I take full credit.