

A little of 'this,' and a little of 'that'?

by SHERALYN ROMAN

With so many things to talk about these days, and this being my last article for at least the next few weeks, I felt the need to speak on several topics rather than confine myself to just one. Pits, dangerous highways, strong mayoral powers, growth in Caledon, housing and a looming environmental disaster are all on my radar and should be on yours as well. Here's just a little of 'this' and a little of 'that'; a glimpse if you will, into what sometimes keeps me up at night.

Recently, I attended a meeting about a proposed new housing development. Utilizing infill space in an existing Caledon neighbourhood, developers met with area residents to outline their proposal and to 'seek feedback.' One of the first questions asked was whether the proposal would include affordable housing, given that young adults are priced out of the market and seniors have nowhere to downsize to. Their answer? The proposed development would be 'attainable.' Apparently, according to the developers 'attainable' doesn't necessarily mean achievable by everyone. Talk about semantics! What does it all mean? Read on.

With more than 35,000 new homes proposed for Caledon; across 12 communities, and seemingly endorsed by Mayor Groves' use of Strong Mayor powers to ensure they get built, understanding the difference between affordable and attainable housing seems important. Particularly when combined with her frighteningly Ford-like use of this sentence, 'We are demonstrating that Caledon is open for business.' What types of homes are we welcoming and will we also build the infrastructure to support them? Single lane roads like Mayfield, west of Highway 10 and one way in/out subdivisions like Valleywood or Southfields certainly won't cut it.

Back to the semantics. Affordable homes, according to the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation, cost '30% or less of a household's before-tax income.' A dictionary would define them as 'inexpensive, reasonably priced.' On the other hand, the term 'attainable' is increasingly being used as an adjective meaning 'achievable.' According to a June 2022 article, housing costs have tripled in the last ten years while the average household income has only increased by one third. Combined with what the article refers to as an 'economic growth model' that relies on the 'financialization' of the housing market (housing not as a human right but as a financial investment tool - in other words, a commodity) it means housing developments are increasingly built with a focus on investment and property speculation goals rather than home ownership. By default, it also suggests affordable homes are considered a term 'for households with very low incomes, which is of little or no interest to for-profit developers.' What's coming to Caledon, now that we're open for business? I don't like the odds for young adults and families looking for their first new home.

In other news, the federal government seems to have now made it easier for Mr. Ford's building of his highway to nowhere. Removing the requirement at the federal level for any type of environmental assessment of the lands on which the 413 is destined, probably means we should prepare to be steam-rolled. I'm sure that at the local level it also means the justification for its existence will be that we need the highway to accommodate all those new homes we're about to build.

Still on the topic of new home builds - whether affordable or attainable - at least one type of new home construction is now off the table altogether. It seems that Ford's on again, off again, love/hate relationship with fourplexes is OFF. While fourplex buildings alone would not solve a housing crisis, they are the kinds of homes we should at least consider as part of a plan that offers alternatives to the suburban sprawl of single homes, townhomes or Caledon castles. Ford seems to have backed away from a previous commitment to consider all options when it comes to housing and remains intent instead on providing opportunities for developers to continue gobbling up any and all available land on which to build single family dwellings. So, it's a 'No?' to fourplexes but a bed in a long-term care facility CAN be a home. Make this make sense for me?.please.

Finally, I'll be taking a break from this space for a few weeks. It seems I may have become a statistic, one of the '2 in 5 Canadians diagnosed with cancer each year.' Like many of you I'm sure, I certainly didn't have cancer on my BINGO card for 2024. I have significant milestone events for both of my kids happening this summer so I have lots to look forward to, but looks like first I'll have to take care of myself. I'm hoping to be back in this space soon enough (portable laptops being great for opining from a bed or the couch) after a successful surgery and fully restored to my usual cynical self, calling out this, or that, in Caledon and in general.