

AMongst friends?

by SHERALYN ROMAN

In the days leading up to this week's column, many of our local politicians have been attending AMO, the annual gathering of politicians from communities across Ontario. AMO, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, exists to make municipal governments stronger and more effective. Municipalities send delegates both to pursue agendas favourable to their own particular patch of the province, and to determine where and how opportunities exist to work together toward mutually beneficial change. With so many communities facing issues similar to our own here in Caledon, I sincerely hope that Caledon representatives find themselves amongst friends: that is, fellow delegates and municipal representatives willing to work co-operatively for the betterment of all. Even better would be if some of those friends are from the provincial level of government from whom real help is urgently needed.

According to their website, AMO's stated mandate ensures, "Ontario's 444 municipalities work together to achieve shared goals and meet common challenges." AMO's role is to support and enhance strong and effective municipal government in Ontario (and)...to promote the value of the municipal level of government as a vital and essential component of Ontario and Canada's political system. Through various initiatives including policy development, cost-saving programs, the annual AMO conference, and other training opportunities, AMO provides municipal officials with tools to succeed, and programs to help maximize taxpayer dollars. The conference typically also features plenty of pop-in visits from provincial ministers and their staff, and where possible, even a few scheduled face-to-face meetings with those same provincial representatives.

I'd like to say I was encouraged by a social media posting on day one of AMO, made by the Minister of Transportation, Prabmeet Sarkaria. Photographed with our own Mayor Groves, and Councillors Early, Russo and Rosa, it was captioned "Great meeting with delegates from the Town of Caledon this morning to discuss how we can further expand transit and improve highway safety in the area." In a separate post, from our own Town officials, a similar photo included references to some of Caledon's specific asks including, continuing to advocate for urgent safety upgrades on Hwy 10 and key truck routes in Caledon, along with prioritizing the Caledon-Vaughan GO line to Bolton before 2041 and a second station in South Bolton.

I'm certainly glad the meeting took place and, whether it was long or short, I commend our team for getting some facetime in the Minister's schedule. I hope it was a sign that the provincial government is finally starting to recognize the urgent need for truck and traffic safety improvements here in Caledon and across the province. Including public transit in the conversation is also important and long overdue. After all, enhanced transit systems provide access to other means of moving around the region and potentially help reduce our reliance on vehicles, something that will help contribute to overall improved traffic safety. However, I think it's going to take a lot more than a simple photo op and meeting to start to actually feel encouraged.

Perhaps the Transportation Minister was motivated by the Premier to meet with our delegates after Doug Ford's own close call on the highway, especially when it was determined the same driver who sideswiped the Premier's car was also involved in a recent crash killing father of three, Andrew Cristillo. Commenting on that crash, and while acknowledging that the matter is before the courts, Ford had this to say: "And this person being able to get out there and drive, you know ...I wish I could say what's on my mind right now, but I think people know how I feel and everyone else in Ontario feels about this person... just reckless, careless." He went on to add that, "he would support some restrictions for drivers after they have been charged criminally with offences such as dangerous driving." Perhaps, even if it took something happening to the Premier himself to spur action, this AMO conference and the Premier's comments might finally be the impetus for meaningful traffic safety (and bail reform!) changes to be put in place.

Speaking of possible changes, the social media gladhanding continued in another post, once again featuring Mayor Groves, this time pictured with Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Rob Flack. That photo was captioned, "We had a great discussion with Rob Flack on illegal land use in Caledon. We're calling for stronger enforcement powers and the release of the Standing Committee report so we can have the tools we need to protect our land and residents." In the photo Mayor Groves is joined by almost all of our Caledon Council team, presenting to the Minister what we hope is a united front on the urgent need for the stronger tools necessary

to deal with this rapidly growing issue so severely impacting our region. Here too I am encouraged by the pictures, as proof that our politicians are getting in front of the right people. Now we can only hope that significant progress was made in pushing Caledon's agenda forward.

AMO will continue for several days beyond my submission deadline. In a perfect world, we'll continue to see efforts by Caledon Council to engage in meaningful conversations with representatives from across the other 443 municipalities that make up Ontario, including those specifically facing similar issues to our own. We'll look for continued advocacy to the provincial representatives in the room with hope that those representatives might truly begin to understand the level of crisis facing residents each and every day as we simply try to navigate safely around our community and beyond our borders. Much like last week's column emphasized. ?we're all in this together,? let's hope our councillors were ?AMongst? like-minded friends from every level of government who might now, finally, begin to engage in urgent and meaningful change.