

By the numbers

by SHERALYN ROMAN

Not having little ones in my home anymore it took me a while to learn about the 6-7 craze. As I understand it, the kids are going crazy (ad nauseum) about 6-7 and so, out of curiosity, I finally asked some teacher friends of mine what it meant. Apparently, it means very little, or at least not anything the kids are willing to admit to. On the other hand, Caledon has a different set of numbers and unlike ?6-7,? ours seem to have more significance. What are these numbers? For those who follow Council meetings closely, they are ?5-4? and their meaning, whether real or interpreted, are influencing the future development of Caledon.

We are facing unprecedented growth in Caledon, much of which has been mandated by the provincial government. This has led to significant challenges in terms of how that growth is managed; challenges that impact everything from housing density, to roads, to infrastructure and more. This situation is made worse by Caledon's decision to far exceed that mandated amount of growth, and by a Council that is clearly divided in how that growth proceeds. I don't doubt for a moment that being a member of Council is difficult work, but with the Mayor holding Strong Mayor powers, and a seemingly consistent voting block having emerged on many divisive issues, residents in some wards might be forgiven for thinking their best interests, and the interests of Caledon as a whole, are not being heard.

Whether we are addressing homes (the province asked for 13,000 but Caledon decided 35,000 was a better idea) or the location of high-density housing planned next to the alleged arrival of a GO Transit hub (wreaking havoc on Highway 50 which is already a traffic nightmare) Council appears divided and citizens are left delegating in vain in an effort to have their concerns heard.

Other contentious issues like the potential for massive volumes of truck traffic delivering massive volumes of construction garbage to be dumped in a local lake, also result in a voting pattern that, more often than not, results in a 5-4 split. Budget talks? Building a theatre? I'm not saying every vote ends 5-4 but if we were to do a deep dive into the Council minutes and recorded votes, 5-4 would certainly appear with some regularity. Some of you might think this is democracy in action and that's just ?how things work.? But when it happens over, and over, and over again, it begs the question; is in fact, a fully-functioning democracy at work here?

Consider too the general level of dysfunction that seems to currently exist. One Councillor has been consistently brought before the Integrity Commissioner; the Mayor has taken to social media platforms on more than one occasion to express her displeasure at particular actions taken within Council chambers, and several Councillors have, quite vehemently, expressed their concerns on the record during Council meetings about how distracting all of this alleged divisive behaviour is in terms of trying to get council business done.

Agendas are packed, Council meetings regularly stretch into the ?wee hours? and a myriad of concerns have been raised by Caledon residents about how, when, or even if, public consultation on key issues is conducted.

None of this looks likely to change any time soon. Eight members of Council (and a Mayor with the deciding vote) combined with acrimony, allegations and attitudes, has resulted in 5-4 vote splitting happening more often than your average 10 year old says ?6-7? with a smirk.

But there's nothing funny about ?5-4.? We are a little less than a year away from a municipal election and the future of Caledon, what type of ?community of communities? we will become, hangs in the balance.

Democracy demands that residents take an active role and participate fully in order for it to work. It also expects that those we elect to act on our behalf find a way to work together to represent our best interests and not just those of all the other potential players who claim to have a stake in our community; like the Province, developer interests, or big business.

Saying ?6-7? is either cute or frustrating depending on your perspective but ?5-4? is just plain frustrating.