

By what standard?

by SHERALYN ROMAN

Perhaps you heard the news? Recently, according to reports, Caledon was voted the "happiest town in Canada." Yay us! I mean, that's good news, right? Obviously, we must be doing something right here in Caledon. Maybe you see this as just one more piece of good news in a long line of accolades including our former designation as the "greenest town in Ontario"? We sure seem to "get" the designations easily enough but keeping them? That's another story. As for this latest one I have to ask, by what standard are we measuring happiness? Who decides what "happy" means, especially when it applies to an entire community? Will we always be the happiest town? I don't like our chances.

If you missed it, according to a recent survey conducted by Point2 Homes, (a real estate company) "Caledon ranked first as the happiest city in Canada, scoring 67.41 on the happiness index. The report alludes to the city's green landscapes, wellness retreats and 19th century architecture as the reasons why Caledon residents are happiest."

Well sure - if you measure happiness by my proximity to the Millcroft Inn I'm about to get even happier than I already am. If, however, you measure it by my ability to afford regular visits to wellness retreats, that's a whole different story. As for "greenscapes," we've already lost that designation and with massive industrial developments along Mayfield Rd., a proposed highway paving over said greenscapes and a proposed blasting quarry in our future, you'll forgive me for being cynical about that particular metric. Sadly, as much as I do actually love parts of Caledon, I also have to wonder about that "19th century architecture" metric - where exactly might I find some examples of that these days other than boarded up examples in Caledon East?

A number of other metrics factored into the study as well including: "median after-tax income, poverty rate, perceived health, and a sense of belonging, as well as practical factors such as commute time, rainfall, and air quality."

Apparently, these are "happiness factors." You may not be surprised to learn that my first question is, "According to whom?" If my median after-tax income is good and I live in a community with a low poverty rate that must mean that I am relatively wealthy and thankfully not surrounded by those who are not. Ergo, I must be happy in my privileged middle-class existence. (Please, please know that I am being extremely sarcastic here) Is NIMBYism what makes people happy?

I wonder, did the real estate company, whose focus (and bias one must assume) is to sell homes, ask the same questions of every resident - including those who are renting because they cannot afford a home in Caledon? Did they speak with young adults or single parent families paying exorbitant prices for basement apartments? How about low-income seniors who have literally been priced out of the market and for whom affordable senior apartments or condos are virtually non-existent? Alternatively, what about those seniors who have spent their entire lives in Caledon, and might even have planned for a well-funded retirement but who cannot find a smaller home to downsize to because "monster homes are us" appears to be Caledon's new motto?

It turns out, rather than conducting some kind of survey or poll, Point2 Homes relied upon data from the most recent census. The methodology is described as follows: the study "considered the 100 largest Census Subdivisions (Cities) based on the most recent data from Statistics Canada 2021 Census of Population. The report uses a combination of ranking scores and weighted averages."

There's more technical language and I certainly don't purport to be a statistician but one thing I feel like we all learned in school is that we can manipulate the stats, graphs and percentages in such a way as to show us just about any outcome we seek. So, if we are a community allowing thousands of homes to be developed across thousands of acres (whether or not appropriate infrastructure exists) then the only folks in Caledon who might truly be happy right now are the politicians supporting such growth. As for metrics like commute time, sense of belonging, spending less than 30% of income on housing or walk score - I'm fairly certain some Caledon citizens might have a different view.

If instead a survey was to ask residents directly, you might hear some different responses. The people at Caledon Community

Services might share stories of how many families The Exchange supports with food each week, how many seniors rely on their transportation services to get to and from appointments (often out of Caledon because there are not exactly a plethora of doctors here) or how many children they are sponsoring to join soccer or baseball leagues this summer because after paying rent or a mortgage there is simply no money left for such extras.

If they surveyed the families who live in Southfields right now and which, ironically, was used as the stock photo image for the story by several news outlets, about whether they love Caledon they might mention having nowhere to park their cars, a lengthy commute that starts with only one way in and out of the neighbourhood, and while the walk score is probably pretty good - the traffic safety score leaves much to be desired. Are Caledon residents in fact the happiest in Canada? Frankly, I'm doubtful and I think it depends entirely on who you are asking ? or, more specifically, who you aren't.