

Caledon: Expansion is thy name

by SHERALYN ROMAN

You'd be forgiven for having trouble keeping up with what's going on in our once sleepy little corner of the world. It's a time of expansion for Caledon, growth that comes whether we are ready for it or not, and not always growth that's under our direct control. Residents are being asked to cope with significant change, disruption, encroachment and in some cases, activities that are ? let's call it what it is ? illegal. Some residents are fighting back on behalf of us all, regularly delegating at Council in an attempt to help bring some order to the chaos. Thank you to those who take the time to do so. As for the rest of us? Elections are now only a year away. What's to become of Caledon when wild expansion is thy name and some politicians seem to have lost their way? Perhaps more residents will consider voting as their chance to have a meaningful say.

Caledon has been tasked with growing our population through housing starts. The Province only demanded 13,000 new homes be built in the coming years, but as became apparent last year, some on Council seem to want to exceed that target, with zoning changes approved in 2024 allowing instead for close to 35,000 housing units to be built. Nothing about such an excessive overreach suggests ?gentle density,? another current housing ?community improvement plan? that's been voted in recently and which would allow residents to put up to three ?additional residential units? on their property.

No part of Caledon is immune to growth, either. One would like to think some of our agricultural or greenbelt lands are safe and, in fact, the Town recently announced they were permanently protecting a number of parcels of land from development. While that's good news, it's being argued that those parcels ?were already protected under the Greenbelt Plan? and/or never eligible for residential or industrial development in the first place. Some are calling this ?greenwashing,? by the Town, or more directly, an attempt to divert attention away from serious concerns about how Caledon will pay for all of this development, where the supporting infrastructure will come from and just how much development and land destruction is actually headed our way in the first place.

This past Tuesday, four - count ?em - four public meetings were scheduled to deal with development issues. My first thought is how could even our most dedicated citizens: the ones who regularly delegate to Council, research issues and take the time to educate themselves extensively about bylaws, the environment and development standards, even begin to share their concerns about four separate applications on the same night? The Town infers that community consultation is an important part of their decision-making process, but seems to be doing anything but making it easy for residents to take part and have their say.

We're told we need to ?support new development to meet Caledon's needs.? But what are Caledon's actual needs? What if all of these massive new developments didn't need to take place? Yes, we now need roads and infrastructure desperately, but that's because we've allowed building before the infrastructure was in place to support it. That's one of the many reasons area roads like Highway 50 in and out of Bolton are now a disaster. That, and because of all the illegal trucking yards that dot our landscape, ruining agricultural lands and adding to the traffic mayhem by drastically increasing the number of trucks on our roads.

Back to the four public meetings in one night. They concern developments referred to as Mount Hope, Mayfield/Tullamore and Bolton South. These each represent enormous swaths of land slated for both new housing and commercial/industrial development and don't include what is already happening in Mayfield West II where thousands of homes are being built and where no schools, libraries or recreation centres (not to mention public transit) exist to support them. The fourth meeting referenced a contentious proposal for a Tractor Trailer Repair Facility in Ward 5, meaning traffic safety advocates would have to try and be in four places at once if they truly wanted to have their say on both road safety and development issues.

The one proposal I'd like to highlight here is the Bolton South application. As I understand it, it will rely on a ?Community Planning Permit System? which is a land use planning tool ?available to municipalities under the Planning Act.? It means the province can, in an effort to streamline development approvals, ?replace the Town's zoning by law? but only for areas under study.

Forgive the quote that follows but it's important all residents (not just those able to attend one, or all of the public meetings on the

same night) understand what this really means - at least for the 'study area' of Bolton South. According to the presentation materials, 'The Planned Bolton South GO Major Transit Station Area is slated to accommodate intensification in proximity to planned transit, as identified in the proposed Bolton Secondary Plan. In conformity to the Bolton Secondary Plan, the proposed CPP By-law establishes one Precinct (equivalent to a 'zone' in a zoning by-law) identified as the 'Urban Centre Area', which affords permissions for the development of a wide range of uses, including residential and commercial uses, generally in medium and high-density built form up to 25 storeys in height.'

To this layperson that sounds like a whole lot of development happening in a small amount of area. While I'm happy it references public transit, I wonder, has Metrolinx actually committed to rail transit in Bolton? I know lands have been set aside, but do we have an actual written agreement/commitment in place? Affordable housing is also referenced further in the documents where it states: 'A CPP By-law allows for additional community benefits, such as affordable housing, (referred to as 'facilities, services, and matters') in exchange for additional height or density.' To me, that just makes affordable housing sound like little more than an afterthought or a trade off to encourage developers to build as much and as high as they want, provided at least a few of those units are 'affordable.' By the way, according to the Province, there 'are no legislative requirements to provide notice for ANY CPPS applications' so in the future, we might not even hear about them! That said, Caledon at least has committed to providing notice via mail out, website and onsite signage for at least 'Class 3 Applications' in an effort to balance community and council expectations while still streamlining the applications process. Sounds like we should consider ourselves lucky when, or if, we get any notice at all.

Thanks to those residents who regularly appear before Council and attempt to represent the concerns of us all. We're limited in this space to providing a kind of 'highlight reel' if you will, of what's happening around Town, endeavouring to distill information down to the most salient points all residents should be aware of. My hope is that by continuing to draw attention to what's happening around us, more residents will realize what's at risk and the impact both now and on future Caledon. We're growing at an alarming rate, without the benefit of a great deal of carefully considered care and control. Elections are now only a year away. What's to become of Caledon when wild expansion is thy name and some politicians seem to have lost their way? Perhaps, if not by delegating than certainly at least by voting, residents will finally have a more meaningful say.