

Caledon has been (T)Sold!

One would be hard-pressed to rank the many issues facing Caledon right now, but surely aggregate must be at, or near, the top. From proposed blasting quarries, ongoing pit and quarry expansion requests, the industry related dangers on our roads, and to our environment and water supply, aggregate operations are extracting a heavy toll. Add in Caledon's Site Alteration By-Law and the work of the Aggregate Resources Community Working Group and what you have is a significant amount of time, energy and resources directed at managing gravel.

?Told? or ?Sold,? one wonders if any of this matters.

That last comment arises as a direct result of the arrival of a letter, sent to Mayor Annette Groves from the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing Minister Robert Flack. In it, he notes that he ?understands? the Town has made draft amendments to its Official Plan that would ?reinstate mineral-aggregate related policies that were altered or removed by the Ministry.? Further, he notes that the Ministry undertook a review of those modifications to ensure ?they align with the provincial policies, plans and legislation,? (in other words, what Doug Ford wants for Caledon). In the same paragraph Minister Flack goes on to state, unequivocally, that the review was done in consultation with other ministries and is ?not subject to appeal.? Finally, in language that is certainly open to interpretation, but which has been interpreted (by me and others) as a possible threat, he comments, ?the Ministry expects the Town to implement the mineral aggregate policies now in force ?. without further changes.?

To me, what this actually says is: ?Dear Caledon, you have no say in the matter of aggregate policy as the Doug Ford provincial government has already told us their position and there is no negotiation, or most of the land around Highway 413 has already been sold to developers and we need your gravel to build highways and homes.? Finally, and frankly, it might as well also say that they (the provincial government) have no real concern for Caledon residents, nor the impact on the air we breathe, the water we drink, our general welfare or that of the environment either.

Minister Flack's letter ends with the admonishment that he ?strongly recommends? that Caledon ?proceed with implementation? of the plans that the government had previously approved, without any changes, and that failure to do so might mean the ?Ministry may need to take further action to protect provincial interests.?

In other words, Caledon, despite the appearance of democracy, the provincial government ?may? or ?will? override your decisions whenever it so determines that doing so is necessary.

The letter and an associated conversation came before Council on Tuesday of this week.

Councillors, staff, consultants and members of the public all weighed in on its contents. Calling the letter ?very stern,? Mayor Groves sought clarity on the position Caledon might take in response, particularly knowing the province could declare a provincial interest and override any Council decision.

Councillor de Boer commented that resident concerns about air quality (for example) if addressed in legislation, would not necessarily impact actual gravel extraction so it would not be an ?unreasonable request? to still try and influence provincial policy on residents' behalf.

Other Councillors commented similarly, and asked for clarity about whether we could direct staff to continue working on our own policies (seeing this as an ?inflection point? to continue the conversation with the Minister) or if this was simply a waste of time given the province could override Council? Several comments stood out, including one referencing that it was ?unique? to get this kind of letter from a Minister, and that the province could indeed very easily override Council saying, ?it's their sandbox.? Drawing a comparison to other provincial decisions that stomped on local Council decision-making authority, such as speed cameras or the size of Toronto City Council (for example) Councillors were encouraged to weigh the ongoing effort and expense of continuing this battle against any likely possibility of influencing the province's final decision.

After hearing from delegates including Deb Wilson on behalf of the Forks of the Credit Preservation Group who referenced the four years of hard work from Town staff, Council, her group and others like it, and a June 2024 victory against the gravel industry at the Ontario Land Tribunal, Council was asked to try and find a way to continue to fight on residents behalf. After further discussion, both Councillors and the FCPG asked simply that we attempt to engage in a 'meaningful dialogue' with the Minister. In other words, do not give up just yet. Mayor Groves committed to making a phone call to the Minister, while staff were directed to reach out to the Minister's office and report back to Council on June 16.

Either way, much of Caledon has been 'sold' out to developers and this letter was certainly an example of Caledon being 'told' what to do. Whether the province will at least consider resident health, and water and environmental concerns as an excuse to re-engage in any 'meaningful dialogue' remains to be seen.