

## Caledon is 'AMP'd' up!

by SHERALYN ROMAN

The media was saturated last week with the news that Caledon (and surrounding communities) have finally been given some of the tools they need to fight back against illegal truck yards. A star lineup of MPPs from Queens Park and our very own Sylvia Jones made the trek all the way to Caledon Town Hall to make the announcement. Hopefully, they took a good, hard look around as they drove here. Following the big announcement, was an email from Minister Jones' office to some of her constituents, referencing that, 'in the coming days' a commitment would be forthcoming, signalling the Provincial government might actually begin to address the ongoing issue of Drivers Inc. and truck driver training. Caledon is getting all AMP'd up - but will it be enough?

First, a clarification. AMP'd is my take on being 'amped' up about something called Administrative Monetary Penalties. This essentially means the Provincial government is giving towns and municipalities like ours permission to issue administrative monetary penalties, giving us 'an additional tool to immediately address inappropriate land uses.' These would be in addition to our current ability to prosecute offenders who 'contravene zoning by-laws,' even though such actions often take years to work their way through the courts and collecting any associated fines has proven challenging (to say the least).

Minister Flack, along with Transportation Minister Prabmeet Sakaria, were both on hand for the announcement with Flack saying: 'Several municipalities have asked the government for more tools to address illegal land uses, including trucks illegally parked on agricultural, rural, and residential lands - that is why we are pleased to support this locally led solution, protecting our communities, including the surrounding farmland, and ensuring the health and safety of residents.' I suppose, even if it's at least five years too late, it all sounds promising. He's right about one thing though: it's an issue that not just municipalities have been clamouring for, but also area residents' groups like the CCRSA who have been very vocal, garnering attention from trucking associations, the provincial and even federal governments, perhaps working even harder than some of our local officials to highlight the dangers we face every day here in Caledon.

Encouraged by some movement on the matter, the Caledon Community Safety and Road Advocacy Group had this to say about the announcement: 'We are extremely excited that we received news about upcoming legislation. We would have liked to see what the full legislation entails but the acknowledgment at least is a step in the right direction. For years (even up to last week) the Ford government pointed the finger back at the Municipal level but now there should no longer be any excuses. These illegal operations will be dealt with at the Municipal level which is within the community reach.'

I hope they're right, and their optimism is not misplaced. Progress seems possible, yes, and perhaps this is just the first in a series of positive steps in the right direction. Yet for me, this is the same Minister who just a few weeks ago sent the Town of Caledon a 'sternly' worded letter admonishing us for not following the express directions of the province on aggregate policy. In it, he essentially told us to do what the province wants us to do 'or else,' so I might be forgiven for being a bit sceptical about it all.

More interesting still was the email received by a number of constituents from our own MPP Sylvia Jones, which in addition to lauding the government's illegal land use announcement, also hinted that her government might finally be ready to tackle the deadly (yes, deadly) issue of Drivers Inc. and fraudulent and inadequate truck driver training. Her email states, 'In addition, our government continues to strengthen communities' commercial trucking oversight across Ontario' referencing things like expanded inspections, increased roadside enforcement and allegedly, 'stronger driver training standards and enhanced oversight of commercial driver licensing and training providers.' All part of their commitment apparently, to support safe communities. It's about time. All it took was an auditor general's report to get here.

In the Town's announcement about illegal truck yards, Commissioner of Community Services Judith D'Souza Soares pointed out the serious challenges illegal land use is causing us in terms of public safety, the environmental issues and the impact on the community and we couldn't agree more. But it's been that way for a very long time and we are only just seeing action now. Whether or not this announcement about illegal land use, and/or Sylvia Jones' seeming promise to address truck driver training is enough to begin to

make a dent in the issue remains to be seen. Collecting fines and prosecutions weren't able to achieve much in the way of deterrence, and unless this new legislation has some real 'teeth' to it, we could be 'all AMP'd up but with no place to go.'