

Claire Hoy ? Good reason to protect the abattoir

My late father-in-law, who was a county court judge in Woodstock, used to tell the story of a group of homeowners who had purchased their shiny new houses in a small strip development outside of town located next to a long-established family pig farm. It wasn't long, of course, before the citified country folk hired a lawyer and charged off to court to complain about the stench from their rural neighbour's barnyard.

When the lawyer approached the bench, my father-in-law simply asked him, "Was the pig farm there when your clients bought their homes?"

"Yes, your honour," he replied.

"Did your clients know the pig farm was there?"

"Yes, you honour."

"Then you have no case. Next."

Which is essentially what should happen to all these cases where people move near an established enterprise ? whether it's a farm, an airport, whatever ? and then lobby as interlopers to have the established people leave because, poor hearts, it is somehow inconveniencing their daily happiness.

It's not the first time ? and won't be the last ? but this kind of issue came up again last week when a group of Toronto condo owners started whining about the existence of their neighbour, Quality Meat Packers Ltd., an abattoir for pigs.

The plant, which employs 700 people, has been there for more than 80 years. Most of the condo owners have been there within the last couple of years.

Brad Lamb, a celebrity Toronto realtor, who also lives near the plant ? and has sold many condos in the area ? was quoted in the Toronto Star story saying, "We shouldn't be smelling that in what is really now a residential area. ?

He also complained about the trucks bringing the pigs to the plant. "You see their snouts hanging out," he said.

Then there was Bob Ross, superintendent of Niagara Neighbourhood Co-op, an apartment block around the corner from the abattoir. He's been there 10 years.

"When this was an industrial area, OK, but it's not any more. Everyone in the neighbourhood would like to see it go. There are protests all summer long, but nothing ever gets done."

He claims he didn't know there was an abattoir there when he moved in because it was in the winter and the smells are muted in the colder weather. No doubt they are much worse in the heat of summer, but then, whose fault is that?

Surely it's up to the buyer to check out the neighbourhood before plunking down the cash. And if he failed to do that ? which he apparently did ? well he can either live with or move on.

Nobody forced him or anybody else to buy their condos near the factory.

As for his claim that everybody in the neighbourhood wants the plant to move, I doubt very much that the 700 people who work there, whose livelihood ? rather than convenience ? depend upon the plant, want it to leave town.

To be sure, that area of west Toronto used to be far more industrial than it is now.

But that's because developers have bought up many of those old plants and stuck up condos in their place. Those who bought those condos are as complicit as the developers in transforming these neighbourhoods into more highly residential, but that hardly gives them the right to demand that those companies which chose to stay must be railroaded out of town.

Fact is, many old, colourful neighbourhoods in the city have been literally ruined by the extraordinary growth of faceless condo buildings popping up on every conceivable plot of land, not only changing the character of neighbourhoods but artificially bumping up house prices for everybody else.

If you live in a city ? especially a big city ? there are going to be all kinds of smells, not to mention sounds, that aren't especially pleasant.

That's the way it goes. If it's peace and tranquility and the smell of blossoms in the air you want, then find a virgin pasture somewhere and move there.

But if you want to live in the city, with all of its myriad sights and sounds ? along with its attractions and conveniences ? then you also have to accept the noise and the smells that are part of the package.

And, as city planning department official Joe D'Ambramo told the Star ? in a rare example of bureaucratic straight talk ? the Planning Act protects existing landowners from zoning decisions.

"If you've earned the right to use your land in a certain way, cities can't just change that and force you to move. Sometimes it's not possible to wipe everything out and start anew."

Amen to that.

