

Environment Commentary ? Caledon Signs the Climate Action Statement

By Skid Crease

On behalf of the citizens of Caledon, I signed the Climate Action Statement July 9.

I hope that Mayor Thompson won't mind, but I was the only person from Caledon at the press conference, and time was of the essence.

The Mayor and councilors shouldn't be too worried. The Climate Action Statement, presented at the Climate Summit of the Americas in Toronto last week, was also signed by 21 states, provinces, regions and municipalities, so Caledon won't be going this alone.

Premier Kathleen Wynne and Minister of the Environment and Climate Change Glenn Murray, along with Quebec Premier Phillippe Couillard, Governor Jerry Brown of California, Governor Peter Shumlin of Vermont, and former Mexican president Felipe Calderon all pushed this challenge forward to address the impacts of accelerating climate change.

From the Climate Action Statement: ?This challenge requires all nations, states, regions, cities, businesss, indigenous peoples and civil society to play a role, bringing their respective strengths and capabilities to bear on the transition to a cleaner, more resilient future.?

It was strongly endorsed by former vice-president Al Gore, who addressed the delegates just before the signing ceremony. He asked the audience three questions: ?Must we change? Can we change? Will we change?? The answer to the first two questions was a resounding ?yes.? But the answer to the last question depends on whether we have the moral courage to change.

So, with no one else from Caledon in the room, I answered, ?Yes, we will change!?

 And as we change, we can lift the local and global economy, and the quality of existence for all living things on Earth.

Here's what we are committed to do:

? Set ambitious greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction targets.

? Join the Compact of Mayors and publicly report on reductions and demonstrate continued progress.

? Commit to the Under 2 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU limiting the increase in global temperatures to below 2°C) across sectors such as energy, transportation, and building and appliance efficiency).

? Support carbon pricing linked to investment for renewable energy innovation.

How does our little Town of Caledon address this? First, we look to the success stories close to home. Our little home on the south hill of Bolton runs on Bullfrog Power, with a lifetime metal roof, super insulated attic, energy efficient windows and doors, insulated garage door, the most energy efficient appliances available at the time of purchase, LED lighting, solar water heating, and native plants no pesticide landscaping. And we drive a hybrid vehicle.

Caledon has already shown initiative by installing electric vehicle charging stations at the new parking lot by the four corners in Bolton. But imagine if the Town of Caledon renewed its Bullfrog Power contract, insisted that every new development, industrial and residential, met minimum Gold LEED standards, supported (hold Your Voice) hydrogen and electric fueling infrastructure, and encouraged solar, wind and micro hydro energy development.

Imagine if we developed pedestrian friendly walking and biking routes throughout all urban areas, permanently preserved and linked all watersheds and greenbelts, and protected prime agricultural lands from rapacious developers. Community development is all about choices ? let's make the right ones.

Nearby, the Town of Guelph has enacted its Sustainable City Strategy. Further west, Mayor Gregor Robertson and lawyer David R. Boyd co-chair Vancouver 2020: A Bright Green Future.

This initiative was conceived by their Greenest City Action Team in collaboration with residents, First Nations, business leaders, academics, non-governmental organizations and city employees in a process of participatory decision making.

That participatory decision making process is particularly important for rural towns like Caledon when faced with development pressures from urban neighbours like Mississauga and Brampton. Every delegate from a rural or northern community had the same concern: land use planning is changing and we have to apply new best practices like the Integrated Development Planning Model (IDPM).

Large urban centres do not understand that rural communities do not want to pave paradise and put up a parking lot. There is a good reason why our planning process is so detailed with the additional layers of complying with the Greenbelt, Oak Ridges Moraine and Niagara Escarpment Plans. And we have no intention of giving up that green and carefully planned future.

We already have the title of the Greenest Town in Ontario. Now we just have to earn it. To quote Teddy Roosevelt, ?Knowing what's right doesn't mean much unless you do what's right.?

We're all signed up, Caledon. It is time to do what's right.