

Environmental degradation at its finest

by SHERALYN ROMAN

My question today is a big one. It concerns continued efforts to contribute to the environmental degradation of Caledon, once known as the 'Greenest Town in Ontario.' Ward One is featured prominently (again) in a recurring argument concerning pits, quarries and trucking, and the impacts of the decisions Council makes on these topics will be far reaching. My question is this: Who cares so little for the future of Caledon land, the impact on future generations of Caledon residents, and the potential harm to a variety of other species, that they would vote to approve the infill (containing materials from local construction sites) of a completely rehabilitated quarry?

An aerial view of Caledon shows a landscape marred extensively by pits and quarries. Local residents will agree that roads around the area are increasingly damaged and dangerous, largely due to the ever-increasing volume of truck traffic servicing these pits and quarries. It's a recipe for disaster and indeed, has already caused grievous harm to some local families impacted by horrific accidents, or residents experiencing the degradation of their water supply. Not to mention the obvious and ongoing decimation of the environment.

Yet, here we are. In a recent vote concerning the use of a now rehabilitated quarry (that in itself is an unusual, but promising, occurrence) the 'usual' (my word) 5-4 split vote was recorded, with four Councillors opposing the move and four approving it. As also seems to happen frequently, the Mayor cast the tie-breaking vote, in favour. The matter has been referred to staff for a full report, but it will come before Council again on July 8. Numerous groups and local residents are urging all of Caledon to show up to express their concerns about the matter.

Remember, we've noted in this space before that you don't even need to be in Council Chambers to register your concern. You can make a written submission via email, ensuring they become a part of the public record.

Why is this so important?

The area in question is a quarry once operated by LaFarge. It was a below-water-table gravel pit, with the last extraction occurring sometime in 2021. Since then, with documentary evidence readily available, LaFarge has met their contractual obligation to rehabilitate the property 'to the standards set out in the aggregate license issued by the Ministry of Natural Resources.'

Kudos! For once, it looks like the system worked.

Folks driving past 0 Shaws Creek Rd. might never even suspect that a quarry once operated on the site, such is the extent of the rehabilitation. Photo evidence shows a thriving patch of land complete with a naturalized aquatic space, including a ground-water connected lake filled with turtles and other aquatic life, as well as dozens of bird species, native trees, shrubs and more.

Most importantly, the once endangered Trumpeter Swan is thriving at this location, proof that ongoing conservation efforts including habitat protection are working! In short, for what the minutes of the May 13 meeting referred to as nothing more than an 'old aggregate pit' the area actually sets a gold standard of what can be achieved at the end of extraction operations.

It seems, however, that none of this is good enough to place the area under protection from further potential harm. Despite the exemplary job done to rehabilitate this 90+ acres of land, the motion that originally went before Council was to 'enter into a Grading Agreement to import fill to rehabilitate an old aggregate pit located at 0 Shaw's Creek Road.'

The wording might suggest to some that the area was nothing more than another abandoned quarry full of dust and rocks. Nothing could be further from the truth. The property complies with both the Ministry of Natural Resources approved 'after-uses' and the Aggregate Resources Act, which 'mandates that rehabilitated land must be restored to its former use or to a new use compatible with

adjacent land uses.

Common after-uses include agriculture, natural habitats, recreational areas, or other compatible land uses. This piece of property requires nothing more than to be left alone to continue its gradual, and natural, return to nature. Instead, the current owners of the property, CalValley Farms Ltd. want to use it for infill, most of which will be coming from construction sites located elsewhere within Caledon. That's because despite "Farm" in the name of the listed owner, one of the Directors of CalValley Farms is Nick Cortellucci, part of a family known as extensive real estate/property developers. One assumes they are the "prominent developer" referred to in the original motion that was put before Council.

What's at risk?

Area groundwater and well water supply for local residents in Ward One. Further destruction of large swaths of land that has already begun the process of rehabilitation. The addition of hundreds of dump trucks on local roads such as Highway 10 and Charleston Sideroad each week, barreling along at speeds that put Caledon lives at risk. Trumpeter Swans, once on the brink of extinction, having their habitat destroyed. All so a developer can dump some "infill." It's just not right and for once, local residents really have to step up and say enough is enough.

Caledon has the opportunity to make a better decision here; to break new ground, and to "just say No." Tabled on May 13 and passed on May 20, it's still not too late to have your say.

Destroying an already rehabilitated, naturalized area just doesn't make sense. If we allow this to happen without a fight, we'll be witnessing environmental degradation at its finest.