

Fact or Fiction

by SHERALYN ROMAN

At what point do we move from simply asking questions while perhaps expressing doubt, to demanding actual answers and holding our elected officials accountable? When do we refuse to believe the kind of answers pawned off as fact, but which might actually be fiction? I'm asking, because like many of you, every time I open a news app, a social media post, watch the news, read a paper ? or even talk to fellow residents, I find myself increasingly given ?facts? that may very well turn out to be fiction. Whether it's here in Caledon, or throughout the province, serious questions about who (Doug Ford? Our Mayor? Some members of Council?) and how (via MZOs for example) some decisions are being made, must be asked. As for the answers? It's not as simple as not liking them, it's that I'm not sure whether to believe them.

In the ongoing quarrel about quarries, a public meeting was held last week to provide an ?update? on the status of aggregate bylaws being designed to help protect Caledon's interests.

While not disparaging the hard work of the citizens involved in the working group, some of those present, myself included, questioned the use of the word ?update? because for the most part, the only update seemed to consist of being told that the town wasn't quite ready to provide one in full. We were, however, invited to share our ongoing concerns, which have already been shared repeatedly, and effectively, by groups like the Forks of the Credit Preservation Group. So, the real question of why do we need another quarry when current figures suggest we already have 13x the amount of aggregate we might need for the foreseeable future remains unanswered. Could another quarry ?needed? possibly be related to the building of a highway?

Doug Ford's plan to proceed with the 413, despite huge environmental impacts, relies on his seeming ability to circumvent niggling little details such as ignoring important existing land use labels like ?greenbelt,? or ?PrimeAg ?' (aka prime agricultural lands). It's possible Ford considers the convenience of a Caledon-based quarry as ideal because by sheer coincidence, highways need gravel and if we don't care about how lands are currently designated, or about blasting, or flyrock, or heavy trucks barrelling through villages, then building a Caledon highway with Caledon gravel makes perfect sense. At least to him, if not for all of us who live here.

In even bigger news for Caledon, our Mayor recently denied that a vote on 12 MZOs with significant and long-lasting impacts to our region, would take place before September 2024. Turns out this was?not true. I'm sure the fact that Caledon is about to undergo unprecedented development (this vote could mean adding up to 35,000 homes to our community) and that Mr. Ford granted certain communities, including Caledon, Strong Mayor powers to push these types of changes, are not related. Sure, the Premier only asked for 13,000 homes to be built here, but why stop there when the Mayor could use an MZO process to approve these 12 separate development applications, even though some of those same applications are not yet completed.

We might not like the answers but we have to start asking the hard questions: Who is benefitting from all this development? Some MZO lands border the proposed highway and much of that land is owned by developers, so it's fair to question what has Caledon itself to gain? We know it's not you or I, and it's certainly not going to be the environment, nor the brook trout (just one of the species at risk from our actions) so who is it? Developers? The Brazilian quarry owners? What is Caledon getting in return for what appears to be Mr. Ford's relentless rush to development? Who is going to be left to pay for all the infrastructure required to support such massive development and when will said infrastructure be built? The Premier empowered our Mayor and created legislation to cut ?cut red tape? and slash the amount of money developers need to contribute towards infrastructure, but at what cost to Caledon taxpayers?

We should be worried. It appears that even when hard questions are asked, or indeed inquiries are launched into scandals such as greenbelt land allocations, or the Service Ontario/Staples fiasco, all Ford has to do is announce ?beer now available at corner stores? and we're all distracted enough to stop caring about answers to the more significant questions. Thus empowered, why wouldn't Ford assume no one would pay any attention to yet another recent announcement, this one about the closing of an iconic institution, the Ontario Science Centre. After all, who needs science to inspire generations of future enquiring minds that might ask hard questions

when beer so easily bamboozles us?

The sheer coincidence of the Science Centre announcement (which the Premier has long wanted to move) is just another example of government overreach, and is also once again, related to a problematic development proposal. An engineering report claims the roof is about to collapse. Such was the risk to the general public that the Science Centre was fenced off immediately but with no snow in the immediate forecast, this closure is an overreaction at best. Is the danger really imminent? Could the roof be fixed for less than we are paying the Beer Store for the right to sell beer at your local gas station? Is this really being done out of an abundance of caution or is it convenient; an excuse to close the building well ahead of schedule and ?rebuild? it where Ford and friends want it to be?

Who is really running Caledon? We seem to be smack dab in the middle of a province that absolutely needs housing. On that I think we can all agree. But that need is for affordable housing that is built with appropriate infrastructure to support it. Our local roads are already disastrous and the problems we experience as residents and commuters will not be solved by a 52 km stretch of highway. Using Southfields and Mayfield West as examples of how traffic infrastructure doesn't meet current demands, we must realize that adding 35,000 new homes and any adjacent employment lands without proper planning in place is a disaster.

We have no good public transit system to support such growth, so, again I ask what should be a simple question really; who benefits from all this development? From the outside looking in it's developers who own land adjacent to the 413 and developers who need gravel. Developers will benefit from quarries, highways, and increased population density housing requirements. Those are the facts. The fiction is that somehow Caledon too will prosper from this ?required? growth.

Too bad we no longer have a Science Centre where eager, young minds could learn the kind of enquiry skills necessary to ask questions of their government leaders, and also learn how to separate fact from fiction.