

How the Grinch Stole the Greenbelt

by SHERALYN ROMAN

It seems when it comes to making lists and checking them twice, (at least with regard to democracy-denying legislation like Bills 28 and 23) Mr. Ford is better than Santa. It's just too bad his heart is two sizes too small and while his lists do, like Santa's, identify who is naughty and nice, his definition of those two categories, vs. mine, are significantly different. What we both might agree on however, is how nice the colour green is. Actually, come to think of it, we might differ here too. My version of beautiful green is a greenbelt that is STILL green, while his favourite shade of green might more closely resemble a shade that includes a picture of the Queen on it. This is the story of how the Grinch stole the greenbelt and why every, single, one of us should be very worried indeed.

Many, many years ago in a town not so far away (and before people knew differently) sometimes houses were built where they shouldn't be. History records the consequences, including events such as the deadly Hurricane Hazel that took place in 1954. History does this to remind us of what happens when we don't listen to mother nature and/or look after her appropriately. I believe we may have covered this very topic before but we all know what happens when we ignore history right? We're doomed to repeat it.

Hurricane Hazel killed 81 people that year, many of them from one street alone where entire homes were simply swept away. The devastation it caused, however, served as a ?mobilizing force in bringing a regional approach to flood control and water management in Ontario. A more coordinated approach between conservation authorities, local municipalities and the province took form ?? and today these organizations play a significant role in the protection of life and property from natural hazards, such as flooding.?

Makes sense to me, but perhaps not so much to Conservatives whose ?Common Sense Revolution? was anything but. I digress. Returning once more to history we further note that, ?after Hazel, the provincial government amended the Conservation Authorities Act to enable an authority to acquire lands for recreation and conservation purposes and to regulate that land for the safety of the community.? As a result, we also witnessed the protection of forests and wetlands and saw more trees planted ? each step playing a significant role in storing runoff and reducing the potential for flooding. The greenbelt and conservation areas flourished, as did the safety of residents everywhere.

No doubt Santa was happy each year as he flew over beautiful forests and fields delivering gifts to Caledon residents. Perhaps the Grinch who stole the greenbelt became jealous? Etobicoke might be pretty but Caledon, well ? Caledon is rolling hills, scenic trailways, hamlets and villages but that meant not many homes could be built upon it.

?That's not fair!?' thought the Grinch and his friends, so they plotted and took away rights, leading those so inclined to petition, protest and fight. Now here we are with no time to waste, hoping to save the greenbelt from McMansions built in haste. For make no mistake, on this you must agree, Bill 23 doesn't guarantee affordability. OK, that last rhyme was a little off so back to regular sentences and getting serious in our next paragraph.

This past Friday was a busy day for me. I attended my first ever protest. I also attended the emergency meeting of Caledon Town Council called specifically to discuss the impact of Bill 23 on our Town.

We should be worried.

This isn't just about trees and wetlands. It's also about exorbitant taxes, a complete loss of autonomy, an alarming definition of ?affordability? and so much more. The Bill will directly reduce the responsibilities of Conservation Authorities ? you remember them, the ones who came into being to address the impact of climate on communities and the damage (like Hurricane Hazel) it can cause.

The Bill removes the right of appeal in many circumstances and removes the ability to ?regulate architectural details and aspects of

landscape design,? this being not just about making things look pretty but to also function properly and mitigate potential damage caused by nature. As well, the Bill reduces or eliminates development charges (paid, in case it wasn't obvious, by developers) under certain circumstances which, as I noted last week, impacts a town's ability to provide amenities like parks, libraries, roads and public swimming pools. If developers don't pay development charges, who do you think will now be asked to foot the bill for these ?luxuries? we all use? Municipalities across the province will feel the impact on their bottom line and taxpayers are potentially facing hefty tax increases.

That's not all.

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