

Last Chance?

by SHERALYN ROMAN

Caledon residents have one last opportunity to help make a difference in our community. One that could truly have a lasting impact on what might otherwise result in devastation. Your last chance ends tomorrow and while we know those of you with little ones might be preoccupied with Halloween, the end result of not taking action prior to October 31st, is scarier than any halloween ghoul or goblin.

There are no 'treats' at stake here, but there may well be some 'tricks.' Let's hope not. In the meantime, it's your last chance to have your say so please do so.

It's time to save Swan Lake.

We have talked in this space before about the 'Have Your Say' option on the Town of Caledon's website. It's your opportunity, from the comfort of your own home, to log in and comment on important matters being debated (and potentially made into bylaws) by Caledon Council. Often, as is the case with Swan Lake, these are matters that could have a long-lasting impact on area residents. Perhaps in this case, with Swan Lake located in Ward One (and you live elsewhere) you think your opinion doesn't matter. I'm using this space to argue it's actually never mattered more.

If you drive area roads, this decision impacts you since language included suggests one person alone could hold the power to designate future haul routes. If you care about the future of drinking water, not just in Ward One but potentially other areas too, it impacts you because what happens at Swan Lake, potentially putting groundwater at risk, could be precedent setting for other parts of Caledon.

Whether you are pro, or against, the 413, this decision impacts you because of the quantity and type of potential fill coming our way. And finally, if you appreciate all that Caledon has to offer in terms of the environment, hiking trails, winding country roads, wildlife, you name it 'all of these things that make Caledon beautiful will potentially be impacted by the passing of the proposed new Site Alteration Bylaw.

Of concern first and foremost is that the proposed changes will see primary decision-making centered not in the hands of Caledon Council, but rather, with just one employee of the Town 'the Commissioner of Engineering, Transportation and Public Works.

That person will have sole authority to determine when, or if, 'a public information centre or meeting of Council is required or not required,' when determining approvals for fill operations. That person can even 'exempt certain works from provisions of the bylaw.' That seems like a significant amount of authority, with potentially little to no oversight by Council (the folks WE elect to make decisions on our behalf).

Also concerning is that the draft bylaw 'coming in at 25 pages' might best be described as 'littered' with the word 'may,' vs. 'shall.' What's the difference, you ask? Using the word 'may' suggests a far more discretionary use of decision-making power (again under just one person) vs. use of the word 'shall,' which is more traditionally defined as an action which would be considered mandatory.

The use of more permissive language could leave the Commissioner with much larger discretionary powers at a time when not just Swan Lake is at risk, but a number of other properties are (or have already) come up for fill consideration. In fact, Swan Lake could be precedent setting, just not in a good way.

Fill, by the way, just to be completely transparent (a word that's getting tossed around at Council a great deal these days) is defined by the proposed bylaw as: asphalt, rock, soil, concrete, brick, sand, gravel, and even something referred to as 'liquid soil,' which

just sounds nasty. All of this potentially dumped into a groundwater fed lake that houses once-endangered Trumper Swans, turtles, fish, other birds and all manner of flora and fauna, not to mention the risk such fill poses to the groundwater of rural residents, particularly those on private wells.

By the way, under the old bylaw, importation of fill was capped at 10,000m³. Under the new bylaw that cap becomes discretionary with the, yup you guessed it, Commissioner responsible to ?determine if approvals over 10,000m³ requires the approval of Council.? Who exactly is representing the best interests of the citizens of Caledon?

One final thought. As concerned as I am about the concentration of power in the hands of one individual, it's clear we have experienced a great deal of divisiveness amongst Council members of late. Certainly the original 5-4 vote that landed us in the middle of this Swan Lake debacle was an example of a Council divided. But, and it's a big one, I still hold out hope and have a belief in a system that recognizes democracy - even flawed - still allows for the potential of a better decision to be made by the collective than when power is concentrated in the hands of the few or even just one individual.

If Council votes for this flawed and potentially precedent-setting proposed site alteration bylaw, we must remember how each Councillor voted come election day.

As for today, it's October 30, and you still have a chance up to and including Halloween Day, October 31, to have your say. It's your last chance to ensure Caledon (and Swan Lake) receives more treats than tricks for Halloween. It's time to save Swan Lake and save Caledon in the process.