

Living a lie: The hypocrisy of land use

by MARK PAVILONS

We acknowledge that we are on the traditional territories of the Wendat, the Haudenosaunee and the Anishinaabe peoples, whose presence here continues to this day. We also would like to acknowledge that these are the treaty lands of the Mississaugas of the Credit and to thank them and other Indigenous peoples for sharing this land with us.

And right there is the crux of the matter. In this placating statement, we thank Indigenous Peoples for "sharing" the land.

What? The colonizing Europeans appropriated the land, displacing Indigenous Peoples.

We are descendants of imperialistic thieves. All that we have and the land we "own," is because of them.

If you want to get right down to brass tacks, we shouldn't own any land at all, not one square inch. Just who had the right to give it to us, deed it to us, or bequeath it to us? We didn't win it in war or conquest.

It could be argued that all land rights, planning policies, development, subdivisions, commercial complexes and government buildings are all built on a shaky foundation. The land we built our homes and strip malls on was not ours to begin with. And how it ended up in public and private ownership is a whole area for debate.

Through a series of archaic traditions and seemingly organized land dispositions, our ancestors made a mad dash to their homesteads. Many didn't make it. Many died. And the land, well, I suppose it all got "passed down" with nary a legal binding document to be found.

Many Indigenous bands have reconciled their claims with the Crown through negotiated treaties, while others have not. Our laws state the Crown should act "honourably," to consult and accommodate Indigenous Peoples' interests.

In this country, there is a "duty to consult" but it remains muddy. This falls into the hands of the federal and provincial governments, and yet the majority of planning decisions are made at the local, municipal level.

Municipalities play a critical role in the lives of all of us - Indigenous People included - and make decisions directly affecting all of our interests.

There is also a "duty of reconciliation."

How can you truly reconcile hundreds of years of mistrust, mistreatment, and ill will?

Obligations aside, let's look at terra firma - Turtle Island, Mother Earth, Gaia.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau reminded us that the "fruits belong to all and that the land belongs to no one."

Indigenous communities have a unique relationship with the land and its resources. We would do much better if we learned from their time-honoured traditions and beliefs.

Robin Wall Kimmerer once said it's not the land that has been broken, "but our relationship to it."

Under our rules, planning authorities are "encouraged to build constructive, cooperative relationships through meaningful engagement with Indigenous communities to facilitate knowledge-sharing in land use planning processes and inform

decision-making.?

Want to talk about historic uses of property? The land each one of our homes sits on ? Indigenous land to be sure ? was once used as a village, farm, cemetery, community meeting space, spiritual centre, medical and long-term care facility, school, business and more.

So, my friends, along with the complexities regarding Indigenous claims, rights and reconciliations, are current land use policies, which seem to be maleable, thanks to constantly changing mandates from the provincial government.

Recent Bills have impacted planning greatly, all across southern Ontario. From the Greenbelt and urban centres, to securing land for hospitals and LTC facilities, the process is complicated and costly.

I could argue that Ontario has an abundance of land for all of our needs. It only requires great thinking, planning and foresight in order to fulfill society's greatest needs.

Some would argue that affordable housing is the most pressing need in Ontario, and the Province would concur. Others say health care is top of mind and with that comes more beds, more mental health facilities, more LTC. Simply, more.

Planning is a balance. In many respects, it's a long-term projection. If done frugally, planning looks at the 25-year picture, not the 5- or 10-year window. But we're growing so fast, it's hard to keep up.

Many interest and environmental groups argue, correctly, that we have experienced piecemeal, haphazard planning in our province. Our geography is filled with puzzle-piece-like mistakes of all shapes and sizes.

And this will continue, as long as the government of the day responds to the newest and next crisis, challenge, need and opportunity.

The majority of fortunes in North America have been made in real estate and we all know it's worth its weight in gold.

?It's tangible, it's solid, it's beautiful. It's artistic, from my standpoint, and I just love real estate,? Donald Trump said.

No comment.

I tend to agree with Nathaniel Hawthorne who called real estate ?the broad foundation on which nearly all the guilt of this world rests.?

And let's not forget today's deadly sins ??oney and avarice. To think that it costs hundreds of millions of dollars to build a hospital is mind-boggling. Anyone in government will tell you that a million here, 10 million there, is commonplace.

That's not only ridiculous, it can't continue at that pace. The well will run dry. The bubble will burst.

And all of this on land we have no right to.

There's a lot to be said for hitting the reset button and starting over.

But we're in way over our heads, and too firmly rooted in the weird and wacky world of land ownership.

There are countries where people are forbidden to own land. As tyrannical as that sounds, maybe that's the way to go.

Let's create the province's largest shared commune! Who's with me?

That's what I thought.