

Mixed Messages

by SHERALYN ROMAN

You'd be forgiven for wondering about some of the messaging coming out of Town Hall lately. I'm not sure if the sheer volume of messaging is meant to bewilder, bore or benefit us? In pumping out volumes of information seemingly all at one time, it makes it hard for residents to keep up and/or to be able to separate the wheat from the chaff. Occasionally, the 'whereas' legalese statements confuse the messaging, not just for us 'average citizens' but even, apparently, some Councillors too. It's easy to lose sight of any positives (if indeed there are any) and to question the veracity of it all. There's been a lot of mixed messages coming out of Town Hall lately and I don't know about you, but I'm feeling a bit baffled.

Let's start with the birds. Yes, birds. Recent announcements leave one wondering, is Caledon for the birds or against the birds? It seems to depend on the kind of bird we're talking about. Trumpeter swans, for example, still considered a species at risk in some areas, and who currently occupy Swan Lake, are not a bird that at least five members of Council care about. Their future hangs in the balance as various studies are done that will inform Council's decision whether to destroy the fully rehabilitated land the swans call home. It's not looking good. The Mayor's previously referenced 'prominent developer' (Nick Cortellucci) has turned down a legitimate market value offer by the Credit Valley Conservation Authority to purchase and further preserve the property at 0 Shaws Creek Rd. protecting it (and the Swans) from construction garbage. It's looking like protecting birds in Caledon just isn't all that important.

Or is it? While the battle of Swan Lake continues, the Town of Caledon recently launched a campaign lauding its own efforts to protect birds and imploring Caledon residents to be a part of it.

Here's what happened in case you missed it. The announcement featured a great close up of a blue jay with a headline reading, 'We're stepping up to protect birds and their habitat. If you care about wildlife, join the Caledon Bird Team and help us make a difference.' It went on to say interested residents should apply to be a part of the team at [caledon.ca/birdfriendly](#). Really? Bird friendly? To which birds? Caledon apparently feels 'called to action' because bird populations have dropped more than 25% across North America. Might I point out the obvious? It's probably because we are paving over, dumping garbage in, and cutting down their natural habitats with wild abandon.

One last ironic statement on the environment adds to the confusion about Caledon's position on the birds. As we were writing this column, the Town proudly put out yet another announcement concerning their efforts at keeping Caledon green.

'Enhancing urban green spaces and tree canopy in Caledon is one way we're prioritizing your health and well-being' the Town notes it is promoting 'green infrastructure' which will help to improve air quality, support physical and mental health and protect both biodiversity and create habitat for pollinators. That's a whole lot of green promises and they sound wonderful. Almost too good to be true.

In other news, which frankly probably demands an entirely separate column, the Town recently approved CCTV-type cameras coming soon to a location near you. No doubt the implementation of such a program sparks debate amongst those who agree public surveillance serves the greater good and those who see it as an infringement on their rights so I won't debate that here today. Rather, the announcement itself is yet another example of the kind of mixed messaging coming from the Town at a furious pace.

The cameras have already been approved. How many you might ask? It depends on who you are asking. A news release on the Town's website said '42 closed circuit television cameras installed in Caledon, in what Mayor Groves described as 'select public locations.' However, in an OPP presentation to Council, the number was described as '78 high-tech CCTV cameras installed across 42 locations.' Perhaps you are thinking to yourself, 'Ok, this is just an honest mistake, a confusion of the specific details.' and perhaps you're right. But when Council is voting on anything, shouldn't clarity, and the facts, matter? When further, the Town puts out messaging lauding their own efforts, shouldn't the picture of just how many cameras, and where they are located, be crystal

clear?

All we are asking for is clarity.

With the budget pegged at a 4% tax increase impacting us residents, it's reasonable to expect that those in charge of voting on - and implementing - new incentives that cost significant sums of money, know exactly what they are voting and spending that money on. As to who has access to the footage, that, according to the Mayor "only records car number plates not faces and private property," another fact in dispute, don't even get me started.

What are the cameras actually recording and who gets to see the footage are also in dispute. Is it soon-to-be-hired Town security staff or the OPP? Is it plates only, or more? These are reasonable questions that should be easily answered. And, when the Town claims it's green, environmentally responsible and "for the birds," it's reasonable to ask if that means ALL birds, including Trumpeter Swans, or just some birds? Otherwise, you might be forgiven for thinking the Town is kind of flipping residents "the bird" instead of providing real and tangible, credible messaging about what's happening in Caledon and at Council.