

Musings on Community

by SHERALYN ROMAN

If I'm not mistaken, for years Caledon has referred to itself as a 'community of communities.' In fact, the Town of Caledon's Economic Development office still reaffirms this on their 'Why Caledon' page. Each village and hamlet within Caledon has its own distinctive charm but my overall sense, as a resident of 25+ years, is that while we might love and protect our little corner of Caledon, we are each nonetheless happy to be a part of Caledon as the whole. Moving forward, however, my concern is that with rapid 'anticipated population growth from 2021 to 2051, from 76,581 to 300,000,' and the stripping away of the formerly protected greenbelt lands - our 'community of communities' risks division, disruption and degradation, to the detriment of us all. Growth isn't all bad - but unfettered growth is. Playing fast and loose with community borders, not managing infrastructure and allowing big corporations to dictate what goes where destroys communities and is a recipe for disaster.

What's at stake is the loss of everything that each community within Caledon holds as unique and special. What, after all, are the Forks of the Credit without the Credit River, or the pretty little hamlets of Belfountain or Cataract? Visitors from near and far come to marvel at the river, the falls and to partake in hiking and the great outdoors. What is Alton without the Alton Mill or Millcroft Inn, destinations that both draw tourists and support our local artisans. Inglewood and Cheltenham are pretty little vistas and likely also enjoy the spillover impact of people traveling to Spirit Tree, or the Badlands, (the brewery and the physical location!) or to GoodLot. Palgrave has the pond in winter and the pub all year long and Bolton is enjoying a renaissance of the downtown core, great restaurants and the developing Humber River Centre. Southfields and Valleywood are the jumping off points for Caledon and Terra Cotta keeps us all connected by water (drawing many to float down the river) and via the trailways which flow through virtually every point in the 700+sq km that comprise Caledon. There's so much more I could write but you get the idea and frankly, beginning with the very watersheds that played a pivotal role in the founding and development of Caledon, we are at risk of losing everything that makes us special.

While the Economic Development office is charged with helping to plan and manage the growth that attracts industry, which equals much needed tax dollars to support infrastructure growth, they, along with all Town staff and Council - must balance that growth against what makes us, 'us.' However, when one factors in Mr. Ford's edict that we must pave over the greenbelt to build more houses and gives our Mayor, along with 20+ other local mayors, 'strong' mayor powers, I don't like our chances.

Factor in large corporations like CBM Aggregates (owned by the Brazilian company Votorantim Cimentos, the eighth-largest cement company in the world) despite all evidence to the contrary, insisting that a blasting quarry is in our best interests, everything that makes Caledon the beautiful community of communities it is now, is lost. All that attracts tourism dollars and local residents who want to live, work and play here, is not the only thing at risk - so too are the water tables, various species of fish and wildlife, environmental impacts and farmland - to name just a few of the long-term consequences, most of which will forever be non-recoverable.

At what price does all this development come? The Town of Caledon's current website boasts 'over 75% of our land mass is protected by the Greenbelt providing a wide range of opportunity for rural businesses, enjoying nature, recreation, housing variety and enjoying an excellent quality of life,' as a selling feature. Further, it acknowledges we are part of a green space consisting of 'farmland, vibrant communities, forests, wetlands, and watersheds [that] contains over two million acres of land and is the largest and most strongly protected greenbelt in the world.' Yet, here we are, willing to pave it all over. We've already seen the impact of industrial development on much of the farmland in south Caledon. If a blasting quarry destroys the water table there will be no Forks of the Credit, no Cataract and no charming village of Alton because it literally puts the Credit River and various species at risk. There will be no farmland to support this massive population growth (who presumably need to be fed) and our various cottage industries that rely on fertile farm ground, tourism dollars and clean air that's not infused with quarry dust will dry up much like the water table will.

Where will the businesses go when there are no more tourists traveling to see our natural marvels? Maybe, along with Mayor

Groves, they can visit our proposed sister city in Italy? Where will the residents go when their homes are no longer habitable? Perhaps to one of the massive new developments that are springing up along the Brampton/Caledon border? Where will the species at risk go? At least that one we can answer because as history has shown us time and again, there is no recovering from extinction.

Caledon Council, Mayor Groves, and all who work at the Town would do well to keep this in mind. Everything has a price and no amount of fines for bylaw enforcement on illegal trucking yards, seemingly our current most viable business model, will make up for what we are about to lose.