

Premature Optimism

by SHERALYN ROMAN

Is it too soon to express hope for the future of Caledon? Are we buoyed prematurely as we watch some of the names coming forward as candidates begin registering for this October's municipal election? Clearly change is on the agenda and both Mayor Grove's retirement announcement and Regional Councillor Early's first day entrance into the Mayoral race heralds a new era for Caledon. There is reason to be optimistic, sure. But is it too soon? The short answer is "Yes," but that has more to do with Premier Ford.

Perhaps you're already tired of hearing about FOI, Special Economic Zones, "gravy planes" and Toronto land grabs, or you're wondering about their relevance to Caledon. The reality is that much of what Premier Ford is doing right now represents a relentless attack on democracy that will ultimately impact us all. By conducting late night sessions passing bills under cover of darkness prohibiting the press, or anyone, from using Freedom of Information requests to hold the government to account, the consequences are - well - we'll never be able to hold the government to account. At least not for anything that has happened this past 40 years. Things like greenbelt and whitebelt land allocations for example. Such decisions have had, and will continue to have, a direct impact on Caledon in terms of our growth; housing land allocations, the environment, our drinking water safety, whether new pits and blasting quarries are approved and whether the filling of old pits (and fully rehabilitated lakes) with construction fill can occur.

Premier Ford also ushered in the era of so-called "Strong Mayor" powers which our current Mayor used to help make controversial zoning decisions on 12 parcels of land. Not content with providing this legal framework to some municipalities like ours, and under the guise of speeding up approvals for housing, Mr. Ford has now also granted some of those same municipalities, including ours, "Strong Regional Chair" powers.

With so much at stake in terms of growth and how it's managed over the coming years, one would be forgiven for wondering what's the point of an elected Town Council when it's entirely possible a provincially appointed Regional Chair could override local decision making? Putting a more positive spin on it however, perhaps it highlights how important it is that we have a good mayoral candidate "with experience at the regional table" to be able to advocate for Caledon's land and water, even in the face of such potential adversity.

We have much to be concerned about. Our education system remains under attack by Ford's appointed Minister of Education Paul Calandra, and land grabs by the Premier continue along the Toronto waterfront making it less and less accessible to both residents and visitors alike. The distraction of the "gravy plane" purchase served as an excellent foil both for his FOI bill, and his government's legislation (Bills 60 and 98) that will potentially result in the privatization of water. Why should any resident, anywhere (but especially here) be concerned? Because the Premier is piloting this new "water and wastewater delivery model" right here in Peel Region, meaning it is Caledon residents drinking water, already at risk from potential landfill operations, that is being placed at further risk by the actions of Ford's conservative majority government.

So, while it is heartening to see active, engaged residents, including some new faces, putting their names forward to take part in the upcoming municipal election, any initial optimism is tempered by the long and winding road ahead of us. Those candidates are facing a challenging time for our community and it's going to require fresh perspectives, and a strong backbone, to make independent decisions that are in the best interests of their local constituents, even when faced with a Premier who issues damaging, undemocratic edicts from on high.