

ROMA ?Grins and Gripes?

by SHERALYN ROMAN

First, I'd like to apologize for the additional deluge of snow received this past Sunday. Clearly my griping about snow last week resulted in a Mother Nature ?hold my beer? moment, resulting in yet more snow. Unlike Mother Nature's payback, let's hope today's column of ?grins and gripes? doesn't result in yet more truck traffic or illegal trucking yards, and instead results in things like more truck restrictions, more aggregate restrictions and more - well - grins, not gripes. We might even talk a bit about ROMA.

First, a ?grin.? Mayor Groves announced on social media recently that Municipal Affairs and Housing Minister Rob Flack confirmed at ROMA that ?legislation addressing illegal land use and trucking will be tabled when the Legislature resumes this spring.? Hallelujah, though I do wish we didn't need to wait another nine weeks for the legislature to resume sitting! Currently, we have an outrageous 1,300+ complaints related to illegal land use and unauthorized parking and storage of tractor-trailers. We have companies seeking to be zoned into compliance after already parking their trucks illegally on agricultural lands for years, and all of this is happening while the Town has few enforcement tools, an inability to collect the more than \$580,000 in fines it's owed, and it deals with operators who treat these municipal fines and any related legal fees as simply the cost of doing business. So, we're in crisis and need this legislation sooner than later. It's good news, but I do have just one small ?gripe.?

With Mayor Groves calling this a ?result of strong collaboration and advocacy,? why did the announcement give credit to only some of Caledon Council? This was a golden opportunity for the Mayor to celebrate a win for all of Caledon Council and the hard work each and every member has undertaken to support resident concerns and address illegal trucking related activity. That those thanked were the same Councillors often on the ?winning? side of 5-4 council votes was just a coincidence, I guess.

Still on the ?grin side,? ROMA itself was one of the best attended in years. The Rural Ontario Municipal Association is one of the few times Mayors and other Council members, from across the province, are able to come together to share common concerns. Right now, such concerns are significant and include not just illegal truck yards but illegal truck licensing, too.

Provincial expectations for significant housing growth in many of our rural communities (including Caledon), aggressive aggregate expansion attempts, and lack of infrastructure support (through provincial dollars) are all examples of issues that many municipalities are grappling with, but which require provincial support to help manage. The cumulative voice of the record-breaking attendance at ROMA will hopefully amplify these shared concerns. Almost 2,300 delegates attended the conference, representing 316 municipalities resulting in 651 delegation meetings held between 250 municipalities and 25 provincial ministers or associate ministers. By the numbers alone, one has reason to hope that progress is possible.

Also on the agenda was a new standardized Code of Conduct and Integrity Commissioner (IC) process, something that Caledon could sorely use given all the current griping related to very real concerns with our current process and IC. How to get accurate information to residents (specifically in an age of social media disinformation) was a hot button topic as was something else Caledon can relate to: rural road safety. According to one statistic shared, 17% of the population of Ontario live in rural municipalities, but 55% of road fatalities happen in them. As Caledon residents we know all too well, using our roads, ill-equipped for the volume of truck traffic sharing them, we are a part of that dismal statistic.

Finally, in other news ? more grins, and honestly, no griping this time. A recent delegation to Peel Regional Council concerning truck traffic in Ward One was heard favourably. Certainly, all wards are experiencing significant and dangerous levels of truck traffic, in part because some roads have been designated as Strategic Goods Movement Networks (meaning any large truck can use them) when they are not designed nor fit to do so. Caledon East, Caledon Village, Alton and Bolton (specifically portions of the Highway 50 corridor) are all areas of concern and new restrictions are about to be put in place for at least some of them.

For a trial period of one year, time of day and weekend restrictions will be implemented, monitored and measured to assess impact. Further, after the delegation (by Dwayne Jackson representing the AVA in Ward One) Regional Council agreed to move up the trial

period by six months, recognizing the significant concerns of the community.

Mayor Groves commented that it was "the right thing to do," and Councillor Early supported the motion while also drawing attention to the need for an effective communications plan to trucking companies and their drivers to ensure compliance.

I'll end not with a "gripe" per say, but a disheartening observation.

While watching the Regional Council meeting, one final comment came through loud and clear. Chair Nando Iannica remarked that recently he learned over one billion dollars in goods are shipped across Canada each day, but in Peel Region alone, that number is two billion! Yes ? "billion," not "million." That means our local roads are home to volumes of previously unseen levels of freight traffic, navigating roads never designed for them in the first place. What's more, aggregate truck traffic (and a potential new blasting quarry) will only add to this unprecedented volume. Worse still, neither freight nor aggregate companies are paying anywhere near their fair share in taxes or levies to cover the cost of road repairs they are disproportionately causing.

It's great that ROMA this year appears to be showing signs of some potential results of the cumulative advocacy of all Caledon Council members. However, when you drive our roads, witness what's happening all around us, and learn more about the challenges so many municipalities are facing, (and the legislature won't return til March 23rd) you'd be forgiven for thinking "it's no wonder we are in crisis."