

The 'Brehaha' over coffee

by SHERALYN ROMAN

It doesn't matter how you take your cup of 'Joe' in the morning, or even, if that cup is full of tea not coffee. What does matter for many folks is where they get that coffee from and right now, there is a bit of a 'brehaha' brewing in Caledon East. The potential arrival of a new coffee chain in town has petitions circulating both for and against its arrival and is sure to make the public meeting, taking place on March 24th, a potentially contentious one. The meeting is being held to request, 'input and insight (that) will inform and shape plans that meet the needs of our community.' There is much to consider.

Times are changing and Caledon has been provincially mandated for growth. With growth comes change and change can be both good and bad. Change puts our Mayor and members of Council in the difficult position of managing that change and growth that is expected of us, balanced against the needs and wants of Caledon citizens. I don't envy them the task as these are challenging times indeed. On the one hand you have the potential arrival of a good corporate citizen who supports local charitable endeavours and provides a service that is (according to every drive thru line-up I've ever encountered) apparently in high demand. On the other, you have local residents and local area businesses that help form the 'heart' of the Caledon East downtown corridor and who also support community and provide much needed (and much appreciated) local services. Here's what I envision happening and while I'm not a clairvoyant, I think the outcome is pretty predictable.

Perhaps however, before I even state what to me is obvious, I should also state my bias up front. I don't live in Caledon East but I love it and so perhaps it's easy for me to pontificate from a distance. Howard the Butcher accommodates my special allergy requests and we love the food at Four Corners. Gabe's is a great place to have a coffee and a treat and Tom's serves a pretty tasty breakfast. There's a store I know everyone who is anyone (It's Roxies) absolutely loves and my accountant is in Caledon East. My son played soccer and hockey there and both kids attended school in the area so I am around a lot. I even have a favourite street but that's another story. One of the primary reasons I like Caledon East is because it still retains (in my mind) that 'small town' feeling even though a major access road used by many a tractor trailer runs smack dab through the middle of it. With the arrival of more new homes however, comes a certain expectation that even though you might have purchased there for its small town ambiance, you still expect 'big city' services and that's what I have a problem with. We might be mandated for growth and new home construction in the area continues at a rapid pace but if you moved to Caledon for its charm and small town feel, what's the rush to change all that? All for the sake of a cup of coffee? I hope not.

Airport Road, running through the middle of the downtown core is already a very busy corridor and I don't need a traffic study to tell me that. Transport trailers struggle slowly uphill or appear dangerously fast as they manoeuvre the steep decline in to town. In the past, school busses have struggled with appropriate places to stop and safely pick up area children. A crosswalk with lights was installed to help ensure pedestrian safety and slow down traffic and yet now we face the possibility of a drive thru lane, potentially impacting both north and southbound traffic, during peak times in what is already a difficult area.

Let's also be honest with one another about other concerns. There is a high school in the area. Who will be the first to complain if local high school students start 'hanging out' in the coffee shop? I've been around during the lunch hours when these kids start arriving and for the most part they are respectful. Paying customers enjoying a slice of pizza or a sandwich. But we all know they make a place just that little bit louder, and sometimes a little bit busier. Surely it won't be long before the complaints on Facebook follow. I've heard them myself with reference to another coffee shop located near a high school in downtown Bolton. It seems fair to suggest also, that complaints will surely follow about how Caledon East is 'changing,' losing that small town feeling. One of the charms of the area is that you CAN get a coffee that's not handed to you through a car window and that you can get treats that are truly homemade, tasty and delicious. Isn't that what attracted you to the area in the first place?

There's a lot to consider. I've likely just touched on the tip of the iceberg. Corporate taxes help support community and corporate dollars go a long way to supporting local charities. These facts cannot be ignored but they must be balanced against both the NEEDS and WANTS of the community. If you're concerned about what is happening do some research and take advantage of the

opportunity to discuss them in an open, civilized and productive way.

My sincerest hope for this particular challenge facing the citizens of Caledon East and our local representatives is that some common ground is found that makes sense for everyone involved. My other hope for all is that respectful, polite and insightful dialogue will be had ? perhaps over a cup of coffee.