

The Dissolution of Caledon

by SHERALYN ROMAN

I know many of you just read the title of this column and thought, "She's got it all wrong, it's the Region of Peel that's dissolving." You would be forgiven for thinking so. But with the alarming rate of exits from Town Hall over these past few months, one might wonder if in fact it is the Town of Caledon that's being dissolved. At 15 people and counting, Caledon staff are being terminated at an alarming rate and still more are "voluntarily" following them out the door. What the heck is going on at Town Hall?

From the moment Mayor Groves took over the reins, Caledon has been in flux. Certainly some of that was to be expected; a change in leadership will result in a certain amount of change simply due to style, personality, and political leanings. However, it's one thing to say change is expected and entirely another to watch as a wholesale exodus of competent, credentialed staff are shown the door at a time when Caledon is being asked to absorb thousands of new residents, development is galloping across the whitebelt and the Region of Peel is dissolving, no doubt leaving us to assume more of the actual costs of development and infrastructure. It's alarming. To lose senior staff with experience and then watch as their teams crumble below them, leaves Caledon increasingly vulnerable during an already rocky time. Granting strong mayoral powers to a newbie at the helm during a time of massive change adds to the mayhem and has placed a stranglehold on our Councillors - you know - the ones elected to represent OUR interests at town hall.

If you haven't been paying attention, here's a bit of a recap for you. As mentioned above, a total of 15 people (so far) are no longer employed by the Town of Caledon. That more than half of this number were women, and seven of those were fired from their positions, is simply not a good look for the Town. That too, many of these women held senior level positions including the Town's CAO, Director of Planning, the Town's Solicitor and the Town Clerk is frankly, outrageous. In some cases, as mentioned in previous columns, the people being shown the exit had previously been specifically sought out by the Town, hired for their talents and expertise to specifically help guide us as we head into these turbulent times. Why have they suddenly been shown the door and what is going on that is so bad a further seven people have chosen to walk out the front doors of Town Hall for the final time?

The appalling lack of communication from the Town does nothing to allay the concerns of residents. A brief notification was given at one point, citing "financial efficiencies" to be gained from the restructuring taking place. One wonders if there are in fact any financial efficiencies gained when you factor in severance pay (rest assured, dismissing folks like your CAO, your Directors of Planning and Corporate Strategy and others is not going to be an inexpensive option). Adding to the cost of severance pay is the fact that the Town is now actively recruiting to fill each of these positions making this entire situation an exercise that could be used as a Grade Nine textbook math exercise on how NOT to save money. It is in fact, a shining example of costly inefficiency - and that's putting it nicely.

Call me a cynic (you already do, let's be honest) but there's been an awful lot of "restructuring" in a very short amount of time and from departments that Caledon absolutely needs to be at their peak of performance during dissolution talks. You know, departments like Planning, Engineering, Finance, Bylaw enforcement and Legal. At a time when illegal trucking yards dominate the Caledon landscape, the fact that both our head of Bylaw enforcement and Manager are both gone is enough to be worrisome all on its own.

At a time when Caledon is provincially mandated to grow exponentially, losing our Director of Planning, our Senior Planner, the Director of Engineering, the Commissioner (a new name for Director) of Finance and our Treasurer is simply beyond belief. These are the people who would have helped to shape and guide Caledon as it grows. These are the people who may have pushed back on developer demands, and helped Caledon to maintain some level of control over its own planning. These are the people managing the money - OUR taxpayer dollars.

Meetings are being cancelled, other meetings hastily arranged and Councillors are scrambling. One dismissal, even two might be explainable, perhaps even to be expected, but 15? Nope, that's just not right. With so many key divisions now left floundering, residents can't help but wonder just what the heck is going on at Town Hall.