

The more things change?

by SHERALYN ROMAN

Perhaps you've heard the expression, 'the more things change, the more they stay the same'?

With this quick little year 'in review' column, having scanned previous columns written as far back as January 4, 2024, it has become glaringly obvious to me that very little has changed in Caledon over the past year.

The only thing good I can say about that is at least construction hasn't started on the proposed Highway 413 yet! Otherwise, the exercise of reading past columns has simply highlighted that not much has changed at all.

We started January with a look at the carnage on Caledon roads and sadly it's continued unabated. There continue to be far too many accidents resulting in life-ending or life-altering injuries on all of our major roads. It's a topic that has come up over and over again, aided by the enormous increase in illegal trucking yards here (and in neighbouring Vaughan and Brampton) and when combined with allegations of truck and/or driver training schools selling licenses or providing poor training, it's looking like the mayhem on our roads will continue for the foreseeable future. An increase in aggregate trucking caused by the potential of a new mega-quarry and the expansion of an existing one will only add to the carnage.

As we close out the year there is one bright spot and that's the tour de force that is the Caledon Community Road Safety Advocacy Group. In a very short time this group has galvanized the community, reached the ears of Caledon Council, the Region of Peel and most recently, those of the provincial government when MPP Jennifer French, Critic for Highways, Infrastructure & Transportation, met with, listened and then agreed, to present a CCRSA petition on the floor of the legislature. Sure, it might have been nice if it was our own MPP Sylvia Jones who stood up on our behalf, but thank you to Jennifer French and the hardworking team behind CCRSA for making this happen.

Maybe change is possible? According to the CCRSA, 'This is only the beginning - we will be continuing to advocate for Caledon on all our road safety and illegal truck yard issues. We will keep going until some meaningful change is made.' Let's hope next year's 'in review' column will focus more on change and less of the same old thing making headlines.

In other news, early in 2024, citizens lambasted the Mayor for 12 MZOs related to land development in our community, to accommodate upwards of 35,000 homes being foisted upon us by the provincial government. Acknowledging that growth will happen is one thing, but people continue to raise questions about the process behind that growth, and whether any of it will be for affordable housing? Well, it appears that not much has changed since that first column, at least until now.

Recently, a group known as Democracy Caledon, whose mission it is 'to champion an open, democratic, public-inclusive process for municipal decision making which affects Caledon's residents' weighed in. The prospect of using Ministerial Zoning Orders to assume control over 5,000 acres of land by using strong mayor powers has, according to area resident and President of Democracy Caledon Debbe Crandall, left this group with no choice but to bring legal action against the Town. Saying, 'There's too much at risk for us to do nothing,' the Town was served notice by the group, expressing concerns about the illegality of 'fast-tracking' the housing developments approvals process. These concerns include a significant increase to resident taxes; the rezoning of agricultural lands and the greenbelt, and that water, sewage, roads and other public services cannot be appropriately planned nor paid for under the current plan.

While the Mayor has contended in the past that development charges will pay for development, actions taken at the provincial level suggesting development fees be waived (also discussed previously in a past column) and the use of MZOs in the first place, each suggest that such a massive building and infrastructure project will leave Caledon residents on the hook for costs and that these costs will be paid for through a massive tax increase. MZOs keep coming up and despite this legal tactic, I've a feeling that they will continue to do so for as long as this current Council is sitting, and the voting patterns of individual councillors stay the same.

Health and wellness also came up a few times this year, certainly personally for me and at least one other regular contributor to this paper, and in terms of the health and well-being of our community. We are blessed with a multitude of social service agencies and non-profits that support area residents, but the number of those who require support, whether due to food insecurity, rising mortgage and rental pricing, lack of employment opportunities or other factors, also continues to rise. Those who do have a steady income, a roof over their heads and stability are often just one diagnosis away from having that stability swept out from underneath them. The 'hamster wheel' continues to be in full effect as we relentlessly pursue 'wealth,' (or at least a living wage) all the while forgetting that health is where true wealth lies. Without health, nothing else matters. Yet, as humans, even as we fall off the hamster wheel, perhaps even taking a bit of time to recharge after a health scare, we clamber back on 'running in circles' as we literally start the cycle all over again. Lessons learned? Not so much it would seem.

Finally, we also addressed the role of our local Integrity Commissioner in this space back in July of this year, with specific reference to ongoing concerns raised by area residents, noting that Caledon's Commissioner seemed to be quite busy. Integrity matters, we commented at the time, and 'in the more things stay the same,' here the issue has resurfaced once again as the Ford government introduced new legislation recently, called the Municipal Accountability Act, 2024. It's meant to 'strengthen the municipal code of conduct and integrity commissioner framework in order to allow for the creation of a standard code of conduct for all municipalities and require mandatory code of conduct training for members of Council and certain local boards.' While it's never a bad idea to have an integrity commissioner in place or to offer training to anyone serving in a public role, perhaps if things ACTUALLY changed, we'd have less need for the work of an integrity commissioner in the first place.

Let's hope we don't have continued carnage on Caledon roads, MZOs, unnecessary highways, aggregate truck traffic, health and welfare issues, illegal truck yards and property tax hikes to write about next year. Sadly, I'm a tad pessimistic this will come to pass. After all, the more things change, the more they seem to stay the same.