

Time to get to work

by SHERALYN ROMAN

It's not just the kids that are returning to a regular routine, for many adults (or those pretending to be) September is the start of a 'new year' for us as well. The month of September represents the chance to refocus our energy and attention on important matters, after trying to make the most of the summer weather. From the perspective of Caledon's Mayor and Councillors, while they did have some meetings throughout the summer and recently attended AMO, September should also be considered a time to refocus and get back to the work of managing the Town of Caledon.

Two hot button topics for residents, that are being addressed during the first few weeks of September, are pits/quarries and parking. In a Town that is largely vehicle dependent, with little to no access to public transportation, perhaps this shouldn't come as any surprise.

First up, on the topic of pits and quarries, a meeting was held September 3 and another is planned for September 17, both addressing the Town's new draft official plan and zoning by-law amendments for the 'Caledon Supplementary Aggregate Policy Study.' These meetings are meant to provide an opportunity for residents to weigh in on the policy and recommendations contained therein.

On quick review, the document is peppered throughout with heartening references to the 'building of bypasses around settlement areas' and to ensuring a 'blast impact assessment, including a blast design report and protocol. Flyrock management plan and vibration management plan' are all part of the Official Plan. Further, the draft plan states; 'an application for a mineral aggregate operation or wayside pit with respect to land in a Natural Linkage Area within the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan Area shall not be approved unless the applicant demonstrates 'ii) there will be no extraction within 1.5 metres of the water table' and such 'mineral aggregate extraction shall have no adverse effects on private wells.' These are great statements and represent lofty goals, but I have to ask who will be collecting and reporting on such data? The Town? Or are we relying on the aggregate industry to provide reports? What workarounds might inadvertently be baked into the plan that potentially favour rich companies like Votarantim Cimentos and their high-priced team of lawyers?

Such questions are valid because when the draft official plan includes current maps that show aggregate routes travelling through small villages like Alton and Caledon Village and hurtling through Caledon East via Airport Road we have to acknowledge traffic safety is also an important part of any pit/quarry discussion.

Further, when that plan seems to include a caveat statement that while 'The Town of Caledon will cooperate with aggregate producers to achieve a mutual agreement on alternative traffic measures to relieve existing traffic problems within Caledon Village,' but then states, 'Lack of such an agreement will not by itself constitute a reason to deny an application for aggregate extraction,' residents, rightly so, must still be very concerned. We will be relying upon the work of our elected officials to deny future pit/quarry applications such as the proposed blasting quarry in Alton, or to do their absolute best to mitigate the potential impacts on residents, area roads, and the environment. Madam Mayor and Council, we're asking you to do as the official plan promises: 'To maintain and enhance the health, safety, and quality of life of our residents, our natural environment and water resources, and our community.'

Speaking of mitigation strategies and promises, the Parking Strategy Study for the Southfields Village Community is also a critical September agenda item in terms of supporting the quality-of-life experience, and the safety of thousands of Caledon residents. For some time now, those who live in Southfields have been dealing with challenging traffic safety issues, exacerbated by severe limitations in terms of easy access to viable parking alternatives. In what the parking strategy study identifies as a 'high auto dependency' community with an 'increasing demand for additional parking opportunities,' the Town is inviting area residents to provide urgent feedback on how best to address these issues. Noting that 'the high demand for residential parking' has resulted in an increase in on-street parking, vehicles parked on boulevards, vehicles overhanging sidewalks and even front lawns being paved over to accommodate vehicles, the Town is hoping to create and implement a strategy that looks to 'address the additional parking demand while minimizing negative impacts on the neighbourhood.'

It doesn't matter what the reasons for all these cars are, or who we point fingers at in a game of blame. Finger-pointing solves nothing and only exacerbates the problem. What matters now is addressing the issue, and finding viable alternatives to fixing it. Oh yes, and also this: the Town, Mayor and Councillors must use the Southfields resident experience as a learning opportunity on how not to make the same mistakes in new housing developments. You know, because instead of 13,000 homes coming soon to a corner near you, apparently we're going to have 30,000 new homes instead. Southfields residents, please attend the open house on September 19 at Southfields Community Centre to ensure your voices are heard.

September is a new start. I sincerely hope our Mayor and Councillors share this 'upbeat' attitude and are ready to get back to work planning for a better, brighter future for all of Caledon. But friends, they cannot do it alone. Community input is sought and even if you're not entirely sure your voice will be heard, isn't it better to at least try?