

We're all complicit

by SHERALYN ROMAN

There are days when I truly feel sad for Caledon, a beautiful place indeed but overseen by a Provincial government intent on destroying everything that makes it beautiful.

I feel sad because Caledon, a town of rolling hills, farmers' fields and quaint villages and hamlets, appears to consistently vote for a party that wants nothing more than to pave over this little piece of paradise. Progress is one thing ? a very necessary thing ? but paving over previously protected lands isn't progress; it's potentially an environmental and socio-economic experiment ?gone horribly wrong? and frankly Caledon, we're all complicit.

It's no secret that I occasionally rant about Mr. Ford in this space but he sits in the Provincial Legislature, at least in part, because about 40% of the 40% who voted in the last election, voted for him and/or the PC party generally. That's our neighbours, our friends and our family. He is also there because the rest of us couldn't be bothered to vote in any kind of numbers that might have led to a different outcome. Shame on us for treating democracy with such flagrant disregard, only to complain about it now that the consequences are so clearly obvious. He might even be in office because some of us believed him when he said he wouldn't pave over the greenbelt. More shame, this time for disregarding the publicly released ?secret? recording of Mr. Ford as he told his business developer friends that he'd be opening up the greenbelt for development. Why did we collectively give him the benefit of the doubt and assume he was lying to his friends and not us? We're all complicit.

Now, we find ourselves in the position of getting the government we deserve and we're complicit. Collectively we need to assume at least some responsibility for voting (or not voting) when we knew, deep down inside, what the potential consequences for Caledon would be. A highway to nowhere running smack dab through our hills, fields, forests and (at least formerly) environmentally protected wetlands. A highway that will cost billions in the name of getting trucks off our local roads, when improving the north/south routes that already exist - and creating connections via those routes to another highway that already exists ? is not only better for the environment, it's significantly less costly. But then?not a single developer who currently owns any of the land closest to the proposed 413 will make any money. How did they know to invest in land purchases? Sure, history sometimes rewards the risk takers and perhaps developers simply took a risk that these lands would ?open up.? Generally speaking though, risk takers only take educated risks. Risks that are carefully researched, calculated and which promise a significant risk/reward ratio. We're all complicit when we refuse to acknowledge what's right in front of us, and when we can't find the time to actively participate in preventing it.

It isn't just the highway putting our greenbelt at risk, now also it is housing. Caledon has been told for years that growth is coming and we need to take a more active role in our own planning processes to ensure that growth is managed well. I get it. Caledon, as previously stated, is a beautiful place; the perfect blend of country, community and quaint, while still close to the city. But now Mr. Ford is telling us it's perfectly ok to pave over significant portions of what makes us a great place to live, in the name of providing housing.

The real issue here is the unlikely reality that any of this housing will be affordable and that's what is truly needed right now. Young adults have nowhere affordable to live and seniors have nowhere to downsize but paving over paradise to build more monster homes that people commute to (necessitating more cars on the roads) is not the solution, it is only adding to the problem. What we actually need are more infill housing projects that meet the specific needs of our changing demographics. An infill project might mean that a perfectly good piece of available land, in an accessible location, (and not on greenbelt land) is developed as a multi-unit dwelling. Such spaces exist across our community but once again we are all complicit in preventing positive progress. How? Because the minute someone uses the words ?multi-unit dwelling,? or ?affordable housing? that old acronym ?Nimbyism? rears its ugly head.

Sure, we all want our own children to have some place to live or our parents to be able to downsize, live comfortably and perhaps even walk to the local pharmacy but an apartment building? Not in my backyard thank you very much.

I would like to blame Mr. Ford for all of this and certainly when a developer buys a parcel of protected greenbelt land for \$80 million dollars and mere weeks later that land is magically no longer part of the greenbelt, the blame game seems easy. The reality is however, that we all play a role in what's happening locally. We want a nice family home - for some of us the bigger the better. We want to live in a nice place even if that means it becomes less so in the process. We want our children and seniors to ?live, work and play? in Caledon but nope - we sure don't want an apartment, condo or a townhouse in our backyard. Finally, when given the opportunity to protest either literally, or via our democratic right (and responsibility) to vote, we don't. We're all complicit.