

What a week!

by SHERALYN ROMAN

If ever anyone picked the wrong week to be away it was me. This past week has been an absolute whirlwind of activity for Caledon - and the province - with protests, major Council activity, an FOI law passed practically in the dead of night and all culminating with our very own Mayor's resignation! What a week, and I missed it all. Sad though I am, rest assured it won't stop me from commenting, and maybe asking some of the same questions currently running through your mind too.

Democratic principles continue to be at risk and we have a responsibility to hold our elected officials to account lest we become increasingly like our neighbours to the south. Last I heard, elected officials are elected to act on behalf, and in the best interests, of us taxpayers. In doing so they have many responsibilities including: fiscal, environmental, social services and more. Perhaps most importantly, however, they have a moral responsibility. I interpret this to mean they uphold and obey the rule of law, they do the right thing when confronted with questionable activity, and they put health, safety and the environment before developer interests. In other words, community first, last and always.

Instead, what seems to be happening both in Town and at the provincial level is anything but.

As referenced, our Premier (and our MPP who voted along party lines) rammed through anti Freedom of Information legislation without debate and which allows the Premier to retroactively refuse to release any records as far back as 1988. This, despite being repeatedly ordered by the courts to do so. To misquote Shakespeare, "methinks he doth protest too much," which (as is still the case today) in his era, was code for "he's clearly got something to hide." Greenbelt dealings? Developer promises? Highway 413 shenanigans? Conservation authority chaos? So many questions including this final one: a number of conservative MPPs DIDN'T show up for the vote, at least five of whom are cabinet ministers. Of those five, two have direct control and influence over conservation issues currently impacted by Bill 97 which could profoundly impact Caledon. Should we be concerned? Things that make me say "hmm??"

Meanwhile, back at Caledon Council last Tuesday, April 21, the agenda for both the Planning and Development and Council meetings were jam packed! Just some of the items on the table for discussion were: a motion from Councillor Kiernan with respect to the controversial Site Alteration ByLaw, a motion from Councillor Sheen on Bill 100 (the one that concentrates yet more power into fewer hands by allowing Premier Ford to appoint Regional Chairs), and one by Councillor Early concerning an amendment to the noise and vibrations bylaw which attempts to address, "Expanding the scope of the by-law to prohibit nuisances and vibrations likely to disturb inhabitants 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, rather than only during designated nighttime hours."

One might argue this one is as important, perhaps even more so, than the others as we uneasily await the outcome of a proposed blasting quarry decision and deal with all of those illegal truck yards and event spaces too.

Actually, they're all important. Back to the controversial Site Alteration Bylaw, which many of us first learned about last year during the Caledon Swan Lake debacle. There are so many things to be concerned about. Did Caledon commit to changing this bylaw as part of the deliverables the federal government asked for under the Housing Accelerator Fund, simply in order to get funding, despite potential health and safety risks to Caledon residents? What about residents who rely on groundwater/wells for their drinking water who are concerned the proposed bylaw removes the "cap on fill," meaning large scale commercial fill, of questionable quality, could be dumped en masse on our collective doorstep. Many residents, and organizations like Democracy Caledon, are questioning who wants this new site alteration bylaw in the first place when so many in our community have raised significant concerns about its potential impacts? Are they developers? Trucking companies who will be hauling it? Because it sure doesn't seem to be Caledon residents asking for it. The vote on the motion saw a rare, and a reasonable share of cooperation amongst the Council which was heartening. Please note, the Town's "Have Your Say?" portal on this topic is still open and your feedback is urgently needed - so please - GO HAVE YOUR SAY!

It's further notable that on the Bill 100 issue Council achieved an equally rare, and almost unanimous vote on an issue. Councillor Sheen expressed that having a Ministry-appointed chair above municipal governance impacts our local voice and potentially eliminates local debate. You know, putting democracy at risk. It seems all Councillors agreed that 'no one in Town is asking for less of a voice at the table,' and voted in favour of his motion. Except that is, Mayor Annette Groves. Which begs the question - why?

Speaking of the Mayor, I have two final thoughts on this whirlwind of a week. Why, oh why would the Mayor of Caledon, a Town known for its beautiful event spaces and gorgeous surrounding lands, host her annual Mayor's Gala at the cavernous and industrial looking International Centre in Mississauga? So much for 'supporting local.' There's probably a lot more to say on the gala itself, including how much money was actually raised and distributed to local charities and/or organizations? These are topics for another day, perhaps after (or if) the financials are released. For now, we'll end instead with the biggest surprise of all - or was it? Mayor Groves announced her retirement, releasing information via a post on social media at 9 p.m. on the night of her gala, presumably so all of us without invitations could learn the news at the same time.

What's next for the Mayor? Stay tuned, I guess. What a week!