

Caledon Resident's Response to "Battleground Caledon" - Karen Alison, Caledon

As a resident of Caledon and a person whose roots here extend back almost 100 years, I read the article, "Battleground Caledon," with great interest. I was riveted by the description of the developer/mayor conflict.

However, I was shocked and dismayed by the number of inaccuracies and assumptions the author made about the place that I call home. I am deeply concerned that Toronto Life's readers will interpret these inaccuracies as fact and completely miss the point of what Caledon is really all about.

Caledon is hardly Mayor Morrison's "fiefdom." Morrison was democratically elected as mayor more than once because she is popular, intelligent, and capable; not a despot from the Middle Ages as the article implied.

What the author called "Caledon's unorthodox approach to planning" is actually an entirely democratic approach that should be followed more often. To quote Mayor Morrison, "Caledon will be planned by the people of Caledon, not by developers."

Obviously, the Mayor believes that the people who live here and pay the salaries of our elected officials deserve to be fairly represented. My family has been here for three generations. I love this land. I'm deeply connected and involved here. I'm aware of local issues, of endangered species, of the fabric of the local community, of what goes on in local government, and of the pressures that threaten this beautiful place. I think my opinion and the opinions of other Caledon residents deserve to be heard.

The writer of "Battleground Caledon" came to the conclusion that, in respect to the developer, "the mayor considered the win an endorsement of her dictum that only Caledon would plan Caledon and that she had come to equate Caledon with herself."

While I'm not sure how the author decided that Mayor Morrison "equate[d] Caledon with herself," unless she is a close, personal friend of the mayor's and has private information about her, the rest of the statement describes her platform, her "raison d'être": to keep Caledon as a special place. The people agreed and voted for her and her platform. Enough said!

Caledon is NOT the "evocation of a fantasy." It is a very real place that allows for some populated areas, some countryside that includes provincial parks and conservation areas, and some very productive farm land. If this is a fantasy, then I shudder for Canada and for Ontario in particular.

Why? Because, despite Canada's gigantic land mass, only 4.7 percent of it is arable land. That's right: four point seven percent, not 47 percent. That's a tiny amount of land to feed the whole nation. And where does much of that good farmland exist?? Or where DID it exist?

Right here in Peel and part of Caledon! The PEEL plain was considered to have some of most suitable farm land in Canada. Right now, many thousands of hectares that were once orchards, pastures, forests, and waterways are underneath the pavement of Brampton, Mississauga, Oakville, Vaughan and other "developed" areas.

The reality is, if the federal and provincial governments want to bring in 100,000 or more new immigrants every year, rather than focussing on "intensifying" towns and hamlets, they need to think very seriously about how we're going to feed these people. We can't grow food on the Canadian Shield or on the tundra. So, keeping Caledon green is not about maintaining a playground for the super-rich; it's about keeping land available for food security and feeding ALL our citizens. Canadians are extremely slack about food security, but anyone who is paying even meagre attention to what is going on in the global village (are you listening, Kathleen Wynn?) knows that food security will be a huge issue in the not-so-distant future.

The article's author seems to have been so focussed on the handful of the mega-rich who live here, she failed to notice that the population of Caledon is largely made up of regular middle-class people who have jobs in or are retired from professions such as teaching, fire-fighting, truck driving, banking, medicine, restaurant work, and so forth. Just like in the GTA!

Take any 378.6 square kilometre section of the GTA and you will find wealthy people, poor people, and, of course, middle class people living there. It is simply not true that "the smaller hamlets in western Caledon [are] largely the domain of wealthy weekenders." The reality is that the smaller hamlets in western Caledon are populated by the very people I mentioned above. We live here 24/7.

And why do most of us live here? Because we LOVE the countryside. We LOVE the small hamlets... and we aren't the only ones. Tourism is one of Caledon's biggest industries. Every year, Caledon welcomes thousands of tourists from the GTA and elsewhere, who come here precisely because they long for the peace, natural beauty and open spaces of the countryside. They enjoy the intimacy and historical architecture of the small hamlets.

A recent petition against road changes that would make part of Caledon more like a suburb was signed by hundreds of irate visitors, who come here to enjoy visual, sensory, and driving experiences that they just can't get in Toronto, Mississauga, Brampton, Oakville or Burlington. Many of them told us they have been coming here for years, even decades, because this is one of the few places that remains relatively unchanged. Apparently, Ontarians also long for that sense of being connected with history and with the reassurance of mostly untouched natural beauty.

What's more, Caledon is ACCESSIBLE countryside. Toronto is the only city of its size in North America where you can drive out for 45 minutes and be in real countryside. With most big cities – New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago – you have to drive for three hours to reach a place like Caledon.

If Caledon is swallowed up by urban sprawl, where will all those thousands of people go for their dose of nature and a pleasant day off? Where will they go to ride their bicycle marathons or tour with their motorcycle groups? Where will they hike and picnic? How will they get away from the city, without having to drive for hours and pay to stay overnight somewhere? This is something the writer signally missed in her article.

Caledon is not a big green space populated exclusively by fantastically rich weekenders who are refusing development. It is a big green space pockmarked by an extraordinary number of quarries and unrehabilitated pits. Fly over it in a small

plane sometime and this becomes hideously obvious. Caledon is a big green-and-gravel-pit space that provides aggregates to millions of Ontarians, while at the same time valiantly trying to maintain the natural areas and countryside that, according to one survey, 90 percent of Ontarians cherish.

Did you know that almost 100 Ontario politicians have signed a pledge requesting that the Green Belt be expanded by one million acres? We have yet to see this happen as the Province seems determined to go in the opposite direction.

The author of "Battleground Caledon" wrote that Mayor Morrison was concerned that, "21,000 people were about to flood into [Bolton] like a tsunami, neglecting to mention that [the development] was to be built out over two decades." Later in the article she mentioned that, "Bolton was a former village that, after a period of rapid expansion in the '90s, had grown into a sizable town, home to roughly 26,000 people..."

Even if it takes two decades, when you add 21,000 people to 26,000 people, it basically DOUBLES the size of Bolton! Shouldn't the community take charge of its own growth? When your town is 26,000 people, another 21,000 people over two decades IS a tsunami. A slow one, but a tsunami nevertheless. Time does not disguise size.

I'm glad to have read this article in Toronto Life. It made me realize how high the stakes are and how little people really understand about places like Caledon. Clearly it's important to educate our fellow citizens about the value of these precious places in Ontario, before the province implements its Plan that apparently favours people who do not yet even live in Canada over tax-payers and residents.

With the Green Belt, the Niagara Escarpment Commission, and the Oak Ridges Moraine all coming up for review and renewal in 2015, it's more important than ever that we all let our elected representatives know how much we value Ontario's countryside now and for the future.