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BROCK'S BANTER: Masters of Destiny

By Brock Weir

You can't really know someone until you walk a mile in their shoes ? and, truth be told, you can't walk a single step across that threadbare cliché without risking your life falling through a well-worn hole. And yet, there is still some home truth in that statement.

It is something we should all take to heart; after all you never know what goes on within the four walls of a home that informs the behaviours and attitudes of those living within. Everyone has a struggle, a viewpoint and a skillset to call their own, each uniquely reflective of the environment in which it is developed.

It is not something that can just be applied to the individual. The same can be said of an entire family, a reasonably sized social group, a village, a town or a nation.

In the wider scope, we, as a nation, are gearing up for two significant anniversaries, the first in less than 14 days being the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge and the second, later this summer, the 150th anniversary of Confederation; both monumental stepping stones in defining the Canada we are today.

In a much narrower scope, however, there are a couple of issues on the immediate horizon I think will help shape how Aurora is defined in the next decade or two.

Take, for instance, a lively discussion at the last Council meeting before the March Break recess.

The topic at hand was not necessarily new, as local lawmakers had walked down this road before, but it had a renewed sense of urgency as deadlines approached: namely getting answers on pedestrian crossings when GO Transit significantly increases service through Aurora.

?Pedestrian underpasses!? you might scoff. ?Who cares??

Well, because it is not just about pedestrian crossings.

Some might see local politicians simply rattling their sabres at a big target which can, in the end, simply do whatever it wants; lately, however, it seems sabre rattling seems to be yielding some actual results.

?I feel there is an opportunity where they are plowing through our community,? said Councillor Humfryes on Metrolinx' plans to significantly overhaul and expand existing rail service with, it was argued at Council, minimal engagement with the Town as a whole.

?At the end of the day they are coming into our community,? added Councillor Mrakas on a similar wavelength. ?Who best to know how we want our community to look and how we want our residents to be able to cross the street from east to west??

I think you might be forgiven in thinking this whole exchange had a familiar ring to it.

Councillor Mrakas likened it to the fight some members of Council waged with Canada Post over the discontinuing of door-to-door mail delivery in favour of community mailboxes, but it had more than a faint whiff of Ontario Municipal Board (OMB) talk.

Those same arguments of a Goliath coming into town with transformative plans contrary to the vision of the community is an old story, whether it is an arm's length provincial body designed to oversee GO Transit looking to make its mark, or a developer perceived to have the OMB as a safety net to fall back on in case a municipality decides to exercise a little bit of push-back.

Things might be a little bit different this time around.

While Council lost the war with Canada Post and numerous battles with the OMB over any variety of developments that have sought to come into Aurora, they might see a degree of victory in overall reforms made to the Board thanks in no small part to the initial groundwork put in place around our own Council table.

Time will tell how a potential battle with Metrolinx will turn out, but Council appears to be clear: they see Metrolinx as the Goliath coming into the community with little to no regard as to what the community needs are.

They are the ones, as Councillor Mrakas notes, who believe they know ?how we want our community to look,? and there are Trails Master Plans, Official Plans, and Promenade Plans to prove it.

But, do those hold water?

Every once in a while Council is criticised ? sometimes from within ? on bending too far on the tenets that make up these official plans, for reasons ranging from necessity to wearily throwing in the towel, giving hope to some people looking to change the rules that this can be done as long as a good business case is presented?or persistence exercised.

A good counter balance is a municipality playing by its own rule book, but that too might be challenged in the coming weeks as Aurora United Church finally prepares to move forward with their rebuilding plans.

People across Aurora will undoubtedly be thrilled to see a new church rebuilt on that that landmark Yonge Street corner, a building which has been sorely missed for nearly four years. Many have been eagerly anticipating just what the building committee landed upon when they promised a ?focal point? for Aurora ? and what they have delivered is just that!

While early reaction to the plans has been largely positive as far as the church itself is concerned, more muted is the response to the proposed nine-storey retirement home, which goes significantly above and beyond the five-storey limit prescribed in the Aurora Promenade Plan.

It might seem a startling plan at first blush, but looking further north to the Centro development at Centre Street, it is not exactly out of keeping with the changing face of the core, but it is a dramatic shift and not one likely to be taken lightly.

In approving the behemoth Centro development, and the development of a stacked townhouse development across the street now underway, proponents have said it achieves the ultimate goal of having ? rather than bringing ? people into the Downtown Core to live, work, and do business.

I tend to agree. Personally, I have long held the position that maintaining the small town façade within a growing town reality was a short term solution of easing people into the inevitable. There will be no room to grow but up soon enough, and restricting building heights to five storeys (with one or two extra storeys available for bonusing) is just not sustainable.

Yet, Council is now putting itself in a position of sticking to its guns when it comes to plans that have been put in place to exercise a degree of self-control in how our community takes shape.

It will be interesting to see which pillar wobbles first and the ripples that will be felt for the next decade to come.