

FRONT PORCH PERSPECTIVE: Spring Musings 2017

By Stephen Somerville

Before this column returns to the local themes of people, politics and public affairs, below are six unconnected, stream-of-conscious and (most likely) incoherent musings and observations regarding the early spring season in Aurora.

First, unfortunately, like the Energizer bunny, housing pricing in York Region just keeps going and going and going?upwards. And the numbers are startling.

The average detached home price is now nearly \$1M and a family needs an annual income of well over \$150,000 to be able to support such a purchase.

The federal and provincial governments have not, as yet, done anything about this. If you recall, in BC, home prices were going crazy in and around Vancouver so the provincial government slapped a 15 per cent tax on foreign ownership. This has had the desired result of stopping the housing price increases in its tracks.

Some experts have said that the spill-over effect is coming into Toronto where, in addition to the lack of supply of adequate housing for rent/sale, foreign buyers are forcing up the GTA prices.

I was surprised that the federal government did not institute some type of program. Based on what we are hearing in the news recently it looks like the Wynne government will soon implement legislation to stop the prices increases in the GTA, deal with issues around rent controls and put forward some type of taxation on owners of vacant properties in the GTA.

Second, as a society, we are trying to induce healthy living for our children. The newly modified Family Leisure Centre includes a very nice basketball court. Right outside the door to the gymnasium is a small refreshment stand. I find it interesting that there is a virtual cornucopia of chocolate bars, chips and other unhealthy snacks for purchase. There is, however, only a very small box on the counter that contained a few bananas and apples for sale. Not the message we should be sending these kids.

Third, democracy is alive and well in the riding of Newmarket Aurora. The provincial Tories on the weekend chose Ms. Charity McGrath as their standard bearer. She won in a close battle over businessman and local former Aurora councillor Bill Hogg. Over 700 people voted on Saturday at the nomination meeting held in Newmarket.

The provincial election is scheduled for early June 2018. The liberal incumbent is the Honourable Chris Ballard, Minister of Housing. The NDP have not yet chosen a candidate.

Fourth, I saw the following headline in the February 23 edition of Auroran: ?Business sign in Aurora must have one of Canada's Official Languages.?

Brock Weir's article states ?Businesses in Aurora will soon be required to have at least 50 per cent of their street signs in one of Canada's two official languages, following a Council decision last week.?

The rationale given was that including half of the information in English or French ?would promote Aurora as an inclusive community and a better place to live and do business.?

?A sign that incorporates neither English nor French may be seen as being exclusionary and not in the good theme of inclusiveness and community, which is the foundation of the Town of Aurora?, found Afshin Bazar, Manager of Building Services.?

This from the Javed Khan, Chair of the Aurora Chamber of Commerce: ?Business signage exclusively utilizing a language other than English or French would prevent a significant portion of Aurora's population from understanding the goods and services offered. Businesses with foreign language signage could potentially alienate a substantial client base as a result, subsequently limiting their ability to prosper.?

I think this legislation is entirely wrong.

In my opinion, businesses are free to use whatever language they want for signage in their stores, be it Swahili or German, or English. Business is about serving an anticipated need in the community. If prospective customers don't grace the doors of an establishment because they can't understand what is inside, then that is the fault of the proprietor. Shortly enough, the business will either change its signage or cease being a going concern. In the later, someone else will most likely replace it. That is one of the basic tenants of supply and demand in the marketplace.

Aurora Council has enough on its collective plates without wasting its time on these types of issues.

Sixth, I am looking forward to hearing more about a new hotel potentially being built in Aurora. Council has been working on this for a while; their hard work may bear fruit shortly.