

FRONT PORCH PERSPECTIVE: Summer Musings

By Stephen Somerville

Before this column returns to the local themes of people, politics and public affairs, below are some unconnected, stream-of-conscious and (most likely) incoherent musings and observations regarding the end of the summer season in Aurora. First, it really is unbelievable how a few months can really change things. Remember this past winter and early spring when, like the Energizer bunny, housing pricing in York Region just keeps going and going and going?upwards. And the numbers were startling.

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

The federal and provincial governments had not, at that time, 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% tax on foreign ownership. This has had the desired result of stopping the housing price increases in its tracks.

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

Later this past spring, the provincial government implemented legislation to stop the price increases in the GTA, and dealt with issues around rent controls.

All these measures had the desired effect of cooling the housing market.

House sales prices are down significantly and it also now takes longer to sell a home.

Of course, whether this is good or bad depends on your perspective and situation.

One friend of mine put his home up for sale last December and it sold two days later for a huge amount over what he had purchased it for while another friend took his time this past spring getting his home in Richmond Hill in great shape and then put it on the market in April. He did not get one bid; he took the home off the market shortly thereafter.

Secondly, my son had his first day of school last week, entering high school as a grade nine student.

How times have changed.

Back in my day, my two brothers and I were extremely excited when we each received a new pair of Cougar or Sparks running shoes and (maybe) a new pair of pants and shirt for the first day of school.

Today, besides new pants and shirts, we needed to outfit the junior Somerville with a new computer and a cell phone.

Also, the orientation for the new grade nine students is quite a bit different than what I received.

When I entered high school back in September 1979 (yes, I know - that was some time ago) I simply walked to school. There was no grand gathering of the grade nines or assemblies or parents accompanying the students. I simply walked into my home room and sat down beside the other nervous frosh.

As an aside, it seemed like yesterday walking that first time past the smoking area that was filled to bursting with students and walking past the area where a bunch of young female student/mothers were with their young kids before the mothers dropped off the tykes and attended class.

Today, Aurora High invites the parents of grade nine students to accompany their child on the first day. They get to hear about the school, the activities and meet all the teachers. The grade nines even get the run of the place for the first day as the older students don't even show up until the next day.

This is a much better approach than what I received, that's for sure.

Although, thinking about it some more, I don't think I would have wanted my mom or dad to have met my teachers that early on and begin fostering any type of relationship. Operating under the radar and getting by with all those ?gentlemen C's? was fine with me!

Lastly, dismantling statues or trying to erase/alter history has been in the North American news quite a bit lately.

Whether it is removing a statute of Robert E Lee in the American south or teachers unions wanting to remove the name of Canada's first Prime Minister, Sir John A. Macdonald from schools in Ontario.

A recent editorial in Maclean's magazine summed my feelings up quite well on the subject:

?By contrast, Macdonald's towering reputation is about so much more that reducing his legacy to a racist taint?serious as it is?isn't reasonable. His name still stands for a sweeping vision of Canada that he largely brought about, although his stature is seriously debated these days by historians?

?There is no simple way to draft up an acceptable pantheon of historical heroes. Each biography calls up a unique response. We

should start by relying on judicious historians to sift what a man or woman who lived long ago said and did, which is no easy undertaking. Then we should ask why they were deemed worthy of recognition, and whether that motivation still feels right to us. And if that's the test, there will be no need to start dreaming up new names quite yet for schools named after Sir John A. Macdonald.?

More on this last item in a future column.

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