

IN GOOD COMPANY: Let Cooler Heads...

Let Cooler Heads Prevail
By Mayor Geoffrey Dawe

I hope everyone is taking the opportunity to enjoy the hot summer weather.

My wife Henny and I are taking advantage of the reduced summer Council schedule to spend some vacation time in cottage country. It's nice to get away occasionally to relax and re-focus on priorities.

It was great to see thousands of residents and visitors participating in our Canada Day and Aurora 150 activities over the long weekend. The fireworks and festivities were fantastic and the performance by Lighthouse really brought out an extra element of celebration for our sesquicentennial.

I saw people of all ages having a wonderful time at the events and concert, which really instilled a great sense of community spirit.

Thank you to the many staff from our Parks & Recreation department for their continued great work planning and executing the weekend festivities, and to the members of our Aurora 150 Committee for their efforts to make this year's celebration extra special.

After a great start to the summer, it was with tremendous regret that our community was subjected to the highly unscrupulous actions of a developer who illegally clear-cut a three-acre parcel of land, compounding this wanton action with the illegal dumping of fill on the property and further site alterations. I have publicly expressed my outrage and disgust at this inexcusable act, and my comments are a matter of public record. I do not need to expound upon them in this column.

However, I feel it is important to discuss some of the comments that followed the tree-cutting and fill violations. It is not surprising that a number of environmental groups and other concerned citizens have vociferously vilified the actions which took place as well as the perpetrators.

We all have every right to be angry. What concerns me is the notion that we must assume all developers intend to disregard the law and that dramatic levels of surveillance ? up to and including suggested vigilantism ? are required to ensure that developers comply.

Bylaw violations are the exception, not the norm. Most developers conduct themselves appropriately. They do frequent and repeat business with municipalities and work co-operatively with all municipalities in York Region. They understand that it is not in their business and professional interest to run afoul of municipal bylaws or other zoning or environmental regulations.

We are governed by the rule of law. People who flagrantly flout our laws are investigated and prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law. While such investigation and prosecution may take time, rest assured that the Town and the Region will not turn a blind eye to the wanton acts of damage to the Oak Ridges Moraine.

In this instance, the Town and the Region intend to move ahead with a complete investigation and prosecution that we believe will result in significant fines and restitution, and set an example to everyone that the Town and the Region are committed to the protection of the environment and the laws that govern it.

Among other forms of restitution, our bylaws afford us the ability to seek financial penalties and demand restoration of illegally damaged or removed trees. The tools to dissuade rogue developers from engaging in illegal activity are at our disposal. Changing laws or expending enormous resources to survey a development industry that is overwhelmingly law-abiding is unnecessary.

This was an outrageous action, but cooler heads need to prevail. The Town and the Region will be aggressively pushing for restoration of the damaged property and a hefty fine to dissuade any future attempts at illegal activity.

Back to the lighter side of things, the Town has a number of activities taking place throughout the summer, including Concerts in

the Park every Wednesday in Town Park and Movies in the Park coming in August.

On August 17, many homes and buildings across our community will be open to the public for Doors Open Aurora. This is a great chance to see some gorgeous architectural treasures and learn about the history of our Town. Our very popular Ribfest event is just around the corner in September, which is always a great community get-together. I hope to see you around Town.