

BROCK'S BANTER: Get off my lawn?

By Brock Weir

Homer: I have to have a gun. It's in the Constitution.

Lisa: Dad, the second amendment is just a remnant from revolutionary days. It has no meaning today.

Homer: You couldn't be more wrong, Lisa. If I didn't have this gun, the King of England could just walk in here any time he wants and start shoving you around. You want that? Huh? Do you?

Okay, so if I said it was rare that oddly appropriate references from The Simpsons popped into my mind only intermittently it would be something of a lie. The truth is, the frequency can be alarming. Of course, I am not solely to blame. For a show that has been on the air for nearly 30 years, weathering several storms and pop-culture moments, I figure it can shoulder at least some of the responsibility.

Nevertheless, it was the quote above that was running through my mind while watching last week's Council meeting unfold.

Last week was just the third time in seven years I have missed a regularly scheduled Council meeting.

The first time was to cover an event in Toronto featuring the Prince of Wales and Duchess of Cornwall involving our local regiment, the Queen's York Rangers. The second time was due to a late night at the office and a record short Council meeting. This time, however, was due to strep throat.

The discussion that prompted a momentarily Simpsons reverie was related to the motion presented by Councillor Mrakas that could bring about real and, some might argue, much needed change to the powers that can be exercised by our local bylaw department. Personally, in my thirteen years living in Aurora, I have never yet had the opportunity to find a bylaw officer on my property for any particular reason. The closest I've ever come to that is returning home from work one day to find my front hedge, which abuts the curb of our street, to be significantly shorter and thinner than when left that morning.

Judging from the feedback I have received over the last year, however, I am among the lucky ones. In the majority, yes, but lucky no matter how you slice it.

Some of the scenarios presented at Council last week in favour of the changes did seem slightly melodramatic, in my view. Hence, the visual thought of King George III popping by the Simpson household just to hassle its yellow-hued inhabitants and flexing a bit of muscle.

As the conversation unfolded, however, I thought back to the previous week's public planning meeting.

That particular exercise was focused on the redevelopment plans for Aurora United Church which, in addition to the new church building, also includes a nine storey retirement building.

The Public Planning meeting attracted an interesting mix of people both for and against the plan. Those who were in favour of the proposal had several arguments, the first being that filling that corner of Yonge and Tyler Streets not only with a church, but also a residential community would be a much needed spur for the as-yet-unattainable dream of ?downtown revitalization.?

Other boosters spoke in favour of the retirement complex as helping Aurora achieve intensification targets on the Yonge Street corridor, the fact it is a beautifully rendered concept, as well as the fact the church needs a partner like Amica to make the rebuild both financially viable and sustainable.

Those speaking out against the proposal had a number of equally valid points, whether it be the additional traffic generated on community streets arising from a 158-unit building, the sight lines of those living in houses along Temperance Street, and the sheer magnitude of the building.

There were some complaints, however, I found slightly baffling.

Some residents spoke about moving into Yonge and Wellington's heritage southwest quadrant from bustling sections of what was once Metropolitan Toronto seeking life in a small town, perhaps a slower pace, and a more friendly and practical place to raise their children.

The fact is, however, if you moved here 40, 30, or even 20 years ago, you moved into a markedly different community. It is not a matter of the heritage character of certain enclaves being drastically changed, or a disregard of Aurora's one-time feeling of being a small town.

It's simply an inevitability.

One can continue to ride the rails north, stopping at each small town trying to outright the pace of growing communities, but that seems like an exercise in futility.

With all due respect, it seemed to me that many people arguing against the rebuild plan ? taking the base fact of the height out of the equation ? were arguing in favor of maintaining something that simply doesn't exist anymore, and might have never existed in the first place.

That being said, however, there were others whose arguments against the plan were very much in keeping with the modern society we are living in ? but perhaps a bit too much so.

In particular, I was struck by the comments of two area residents who said they were happy to see the church finally in a position to rebuild but, unusually, seemed slightly uncomfortable with the fact of the matter. That fact being it was a United Church that was being rebuilt in this multicultural community.

?We respect all places of worship and church steeples and crosses are not a problem,? said one resident of the two steeples proposed in the plan, which include multi-storey crosses in glass climbing the height of the tower. ?I cannot imagine driving up Yonge Street and seeing these imposing crosses as I approach our little town centre. It simply does not convey the right message of inclusion of who we are in the Town. It doesn't reflect our diversity or our multiculturalism. It is a sensitive matter, but it does need to be addressed, because it is going to be built in the heart of our little down.?

But, is it a sensitive matter?

Should the fact that a church is being rebuilt on the land it has called home for just about as long as Canada has been a country, bedecking itself in crosses be an issue that needs to be addressed?

Does it fly in the face of multicultural Aurora?

Would it be a matter of similar concern if a non-Christian place of worship was going to be rebuild and decided to incorporate a Star of David, a star and crescent, a Buddha or another symbol into their architectural motif?

Is this a case of the proverbial King of England looking to come onto your property and push you around?

Let me know your thoughts.