

POLITICS AS USUAL: A Walk in the Woods

By Alison Collins-Mrakas

I had my walk in the woods (as opposed to my walk in the snow) this weekend and was once again struck by how wonderful our trail system is.

Aurora's trail systems have been very well-planned and well-positioned. They snake through our neighbourhoods adding much needed green space ? and quiet from the never-ending sounds of urban life. When you think about it, for such a relatively small municipality, we really are fortunate in Aurora to have this large expanse of wooded trails beside streams and small ponds, dotting virtually every neighbourhood. We can thank our Trails Committee for pushing hard to add even more to our trail system and the life-affirming green space it proffers.

It clearly is a very important natural amenity for residents. The system is widely used throughout the year, regardless of the weather.

I have never gone for a walk or run without seeing other people similarly enjoying the serenity that our trail systems afford us. I have been a runner most my life, and have spent most of my time running on city streets. So the fact that I have ready access to a fantastic natural running route that is literally kilometres long, is an absolute treasure. I love it. Though I do have to say that the system that is behind our new house is far more challenging. I feel like I am on some sort of military training exercise with all the hills and rocks and things ? it's exhausting!

Of course getting lost and ending up at Bathurst and St. Johns sort of adds to the exhaustion level (and thank you to the very kind couple with the schnauzer that helped me find my way back home! Stupid GPS thing on my training system, decided to conk out in the middle of my run.)

I used to live in Toronto near the belt line which was also a ?trail system? for runners and walkers. But after being jumped by a drunken lout at 6 a.m. on a Saturday morning while running on said path, I decided to stick to the city streets for my running. It was safer! I'd rather dodge some cars than a maniac in the woods!

Running in Aurora's trail system lets you escape to nature while still at home. You can see all kinds of wildlife ? some rather up close and personal ? cheeky chipmunks! This past weekend I was treated to the site of two truly enormous red-crested woodpeckers ? mere feet from me ? making a meal of a dead tree stump. They were simply beautiful.

Which brings me to a bit of a lament. I have always felt like I was in the middle of the woods when on the trails but this time ? for the first time ? I didn't feel enveloped in the greenery. That's because quite a bit of it is gone. As I was walking and not running, I was able to stop and take notice of the damage that the ice storm and subsequent harsh winter we had, bore on our tree canopy. There were quite a few open spaces, gaping holes in the canopy, beneath which were sizeable carcasses of once majestic trees. The forest floor is literally littered with felled trees.

New growth is taking root that's for sure, but I am not sure what type of canopy we will have ? and when ? given how things look right now. It's a shame really. This beautiful trail system will be for naught if it doesn't get a wee bit of tending. I am not an expert botanist or arborist but personally I think we need some strategic plantings to assist the regrowth and redevelopment of our trail system's ecosystem.

I am not aware of any Town plan to replace the trees within the trail system ? but if there is ? and you need volunteers, then count me in. I'd like to do my part to give back to the trails and trees that I have enjoyed for 10 years now. I'd like to make sure that they'll be there ? and healthy ? for decades more to come.

Until next week, stay informed; stay involved because this is ? after all ? Our Town.

If you'd like to contact me, I can be reached at: acollinsmrakas@gmail.com.