

POLITICS AS USUAL: In praise of trails and biking

By Alison Collins-Mrakas

This week, I am ceding my column space to a guest columnist ? **Richard Doust** ? who is a member of the Trails and Active Transportation Committee. He is also Co-Chair of the Bike Aurora Day planning group. On June 24, Bike Aurora will take place as a celebration of our trails and biking.

?Happy trails to you, until we meet again.? Roy Rogers

Trails invite action.

Be it walking, jogging or biking, trails call us to the joy of motion, and motion in beauty, as we explore the natural wonders of Aurora that lie off-road.

Residents know this.

In Town surveys, they rank trails as one of the greatest attractions to life here, especially in a rapidly growing community. The stats show their importance. The town has about 60 km of trails and more in the works. Aurorans have in our trails a gift that keeps on giving, keeps on growing. We need to celebrate this and never take it for granted.

I love walking, running and mountain biking on our trails. Each has its own charms.

Walking is pastoral. At this slower pace, Nature rewards us with hundreds of epiphanies in spring: trilliums and lilacs in bloom; painted turtles sunning on logs in the marsh; swans on the ponds; waterfalls in Sheppard's Bush. You miss little walking, if you are fully attentive.

Running speeds things up. Here is the joy of being in Nature and being in fast gear. Breathe deep the oxygenated environment of treed trails as you motor through. Look around at the wild raspberry bushes; the Norwegian pine; the woodpeckered oak. This surely beats the streets.

Winding through the trail network, you feel your heart racing, in the delight of motion, in the rich panorama of the trails.

And then there's mountain biking.

When I first took this up in Toronto I lived where there were limited off-road trails. No more. I have enjoyed every kilometre of the network in Aurora. Every trail has its own identity, and it pays to stop and pay attention when the unexpected happens. There was that pileated woodpecker just a few trees away, having lunch. Or that broad-winged hawk you saw snacking on, well, something. Or the Northern Oriole resting, a show-stopper in living colour.

Biking is a celebration of motion and balance, of instinct and planning, of the spontaneous and the deliberate. The bike is an extension of the body, and of the mind. It is part of us. In fact, we can almost forget it is there when we coast down a hill. When we go along a trail there's a sense of pioneering, of a courier de bois on wheels, that is, I think, exhilarating.

Bottom line: we need our trails. And our trails need us.

Imagine Aurora without trails. Imagine only paved streets and roads. It's not a pretty picture. But we do have them, so let's use them and let's support them. They can be a natural ally as Aurora seeks to become the fittest community in Canada by 2020.

As a member of the Trails and Active Transportation Committee, I appreciate the synergy between trails and active living. And I know the value of what the Parks and Recreation staff do to ensure our trails are in good order.

I look forward to seeing everyone on June 24. For details check us on Facebook.