

## POLITICS AS USUAL: It ain't sexy

By Alison Collins-Mrakas

As the GTA recovers from its recent face to face encounter with the fury of Mother Nature, I think it is high time that our elected officials deal with a serious issue that was laid bare by the storm and its aftermath ? our fragile, critical infrastructure. Yes, road repair and sewage maintenance and bridge building isn't sexy. No Council wants to blow its entire capital budget on fixing the roads. However, just like you don't install a \$20,000 gourmet kitchen when what you need is a new roof, sometimes the bright and shiny toys of grand municipal projects need to be mothballed and funds invested instead in the maintenance and planning of our critical infrastructure ? the things you don't see until they fall apart.

Repair and Replacement (R&R) has languished on the sidelines of budget deliberations for so long that we are now at the stage where patchwork repairs might no longer be possible; whole-scale replacement of key pieces of infrastructure will probably be needed in the very near future in Aurora, as it will be in many communities.

Aurora is not there. We do not have our own mini-version of the crumbling Gardiner Expressway in our midst. We have many, many roads that need repair and resurfacing. We have aging sewage systems that need relining, repair or just replacement. We have culverts and swales and other water management systems that similarly need updating, repairs or replacements.

With regards to the threat of flooding in particular, there are, of course, the hydrogeological realities of the Town of Aurora. As most people are aware ? certainly those with active sumps in their basements ? we sit on top of a very high water table. Aurora has a number of watercourses, both surface and buried, that crisscross the municipality. This can pose significant risks to both infrastructure and residential dwellings alike during substantial rains.

With heavy downpours, the ground becomes super-saturated and, combined with the existing high water table, there is literally nowhere for the water to go.

The fact that more and more of our community is being paved over and covered with impermeable surfaces exacerbates this problem.

But what can be done? It comes back to the decision-making processes themselves. Budget deliberations are only part of the issue. How many years have we watched as Council after Council shaved percentage points off the funds going into the Capital Reserve fund ? literally the Rainy Day Fund ? to bring down the tax levy despite the pleas from our Treasurer to do otherwise? When the day of reckoning comes and a major piece of infrastructure fails, will we have the funds necessary to address the problem? If we are like most of the municipalities in our fair province, I believe the answer is ?no?.

Budget decisions are only part of the problem. It is the cumulative effect of planning decisions and budgeting decisions that pose the most serious risk to future infrastructure functionality and viability. Decision-making processes at the municipal level are undertaken in isolation.

Councils are forced to look at what's on the table rather than how the decision before them is impacted by previous decisions and impacts future decisions ? planning, budgetary or otherwise.

I mentioned the concept of triple bottom-line analysis in a column a few weeks back. This concept speaks to the need to consider the social, environmental and financial implications of any decision made. Yes, it is complicated. Yes, it is often time consuming... and yes, on its face it often leads to a more ?costly? decision ? at least at first.

So that's it for this week, until next week, stay informed, stay involved because this is after all Our Town.