



View From the Editor's Desk: What is Wrong With the OMB?

On a warm autumn day the countryside has a particular scent, of dried grasses, tangy apples, scuffed leaves and strong wildflowers heavy with blooms or seedheads. On a crisp day someone might have a woodstove giving off a smell of comfort into the air.

Yet despite the special beauty of autumn, there's also a tinge of melancholy. The year is turning to winter and especially this year, we haven't had nearly enough good summer weather.

As well, there's sadness in my neighbourhood because this may be the last autumn that we live in a safe rural community. The Ontario Municipal Board (OMB) recently decided to approve a development that will turn a century farm into a for-profit, commercial institution that if successful, could greatly increase daily road traffic and like all large developments, could threaten the quality and quantity of residential water wells.

Two levels of local government voted against the application so of course the landowners, their planning consultant and pro-development lawyer took it to the OMB. And like the OMB does in something like 95 per cent of the time, it voted in favour.

I thought the OMB was going to be reformed. What happened? Why does a distant, pro-development body keep overriding the wishes of local residents and governments? Can you tell me what's going on?

Many Communities Fighting Bad Development

The problem is up and down the length of the Niagara Escarpment. Almost every community is fighting an application for some development, including quarries that require the pumping of water in perpetuity, and housing subdivisions or commercial institutions in the middle of rural lands.

The odds are stacked against communities anyway, because it is expensive, time-consuming and emotionally draining to fight to keep their part of the province as it is, all on top of a too-full day spent earning a living, raising a family and maintaining a property.

On the other hand, speculators, developers and their consultants stand to gain big bucks by their efforts. This is their full-time jobs, or their costs are a small investment in order to reap tantalizing profits. The rest of the community has to tolerate increased noise, traffic, tremours from blasting, and a general degradation of the surroundings that they paid well to be part of.

There's also a "divide and conquer" strategy at work to isolate our communities, call us NIMBYers (Not In My Backyard) and make us feel like whiners complaining about changes to properties that we don't own. Yet seen collectively, the permanent changes to Escarpment-area communities are having a massive effect. Despite supposed protection, the Niagara Escarpment itself is no longer an unbroken wildlife corridor. It is pocked with quarries and industry that are allowed as exceptions by the Ministry of Natural Resources. A short trip in an airplane could make you weep.

I'm not against development of any kind. We need better development, consisting of creative housing in pedestrian-friendly communities, more local market garden farms, wildlife preserves and rehabilitation sanctuaries, hostels, B&Bs, and camping areas for Bruce Trail hikers, to name a few. What inappropriate development threatens your community, or what would you like to see as acceptable development?

In This Issue

So there may be unfortunate elements in some communities, but overall, Escarpment communities remain great places to live and visit. This issue presents some interesting options for you to consider.

We are delighted to feature our first Niagara winery, Ontario's only organic winery, Frogpond Farm. We met the owners at the Guelph Organic Conference early this year, and their hard work and commitment impressed

us. Writer Trudi Down spent a taxing afternoon touring the farm and sampling the products in order to bring you a detailed look so that you can plan your own visit.

Ken Haigh spent a little more energy in bringing us a report of another section of the Bruce Trail, Beaver Valley's new Falling Water Trail. Photographer Robert Burcher provided great views that make you feel as if you are there.

This fall, visual artists are opening up their homes, studios, workshops and galleries to let you browse to your heart's content. Our feature on artists' studio tours may have you planning a great day tootling around the gorgeous countryside.

Our other interesting features and columns should give you good reasons to take a break and escape into other people's experiences and points of view. Please send us your own, as we are making room to publish your messages and photographs in a new department called, of course, Views From Our Readers. You can reach me at editor@EscarpmentViews.ca.

We have a correction to make to the summer issue: on page 24, in the article "Re-Dressing Waste," the fourth model's name is Stephanie Driedger.

Gloria

Gloria Hildebrandt, Editor