

Who chopped down the cherry tree?

by BRIAN LOCKHART

The house that I grew up in was part of a subdivision built in the mid-1950s.

My parents purchased that house as a newlywed couple before the builder even broke ground, based on the plans alone ? as did most of the people in the neighbourhood.

At one time, I knew just about everyone in that neighbourhood, as the young couples who bought there all had kids my age or within a few years. Most of us went all the way through elementary and high school together.

Over the years, the kids grew up and moved away, although many of the parents stayed in their homes.

Eventually, that neighbourhood was filled with a lot of elderly people ? many of them widows living alone. As that generation died off, the houses are now being purchased by a new generation of young families who will repeat history and raise kids of their own.

One of the very unique things about his neighbourhood was the fact that many of the homes had pear trees in the backyard.

The entire neighbourhood had been built on a pear orchard. Why the trees weren't all removed, I'm not sure. They were great for climbing as a kid, but fruit trees need to be pruned and taken care of.

These trees were all overgrown and huge.

I recall my father telling me that when they bought the property, he insisted the trees be removed because he saw nothing but trouble in the future, and he was right.

The trees still produced fruit, but each year the neighbour's yards were a mess with fallen fruit all over the ground and leaves piled high.

Down the street, there was an abandoned field where we used to play. It was filled with cherry trees on one side and an orchard of peach trees on the other side. By this point in time, the orchard had been neglected because some developer purchased the property, and farmer Brown probably retired with the money.

All those cherry and peach trees were later bulldozed. The property now has a school, a large park with a swimming pool, which I did enjoy as a kid, and some houses on one side.

The thing is, there are only a couple of places in all of Canada where you can grow tender fruit ? the Niagara Fruit Belt being one of those places.

The area, mostly Niagara-on-the-Lake, still grows peaches, cherries, pears, and plums and has a lot of vineyards.

But those orchards on the north side of Niagara Falls will never again produce any kind of fruit because they are all paved over.

When the Ontario Greenbelt was established, the idea was to protect farmland, communities, forests, wetlands and watersheds, as well as cultural heritage places, while supporting recreation and tourism.

The Greenbelt covers an area of over 800,000 hectares of land.

There are a lot of people in the province who are upset about the provincial government's decision to allow development on Greenbelt land. They should be upset.

The idea of the Greenbelt was to protect sensitive areas and the farmland that keeps us fed.

The Conservation Authorities around the province were created for a reason and do a good job of protecting waterways around Ontario. Now their expertise is being ignored, and authority eroded in favour of filling sensitive wetlands with cookie-cutter houses.

The idea behind the Greenbelt is right in its name ? GREEN.

Once you start sending bulldozers and earth movers into sensitive lands, there is no going back.

There is a new subdivision going up in a sensitive area near where I live. The area is already prone to flooding. As I passed by on a regular basis, I noticed thousands of truckloads of earth were being brought in, and the development was getting a rise in elevation. Apparently, by several feet, due to concerns of high water causing problems with the new houses.

The residents in a long-established neighbourhood across the road were suitably alarmed.

I spoke to several of them at a town meeting about the new development.

The cause for concern was that since the area already has flooding problems, and the new neighbourhood will tower over theirs, what will happen during heavy rain? Well, water runs downhill and guess who's going to get that flood?

You don't have to be an environmental engineer to see a big problem in the future when the lower neighbourhood residents have water pouring into their basements after a big storm.

The Greenbelt is there for a reason ? leave it alone.