

Always go straight to the top

by BRIAN LOCKHART

As a person who travels around this great province quite a bit, I have a couple of regions that are my favourites.

The north shore of Lake Erie is beautiful. There are many small towns and villages along that 350-kilometre stretch of water.

There are also many wide-open, undeveloped spaces along the north shore, with beaches, some provincial parks, and a lot of wild areas where you can explore and see some amazing things.

I also like exploring the east shore of Lake Huron. There are some really beautiful, well-kept towns in that region, some great beaches, picturesque lighthouses, and wide-open areas along the lake.

I speak to a lot of locals on my travels, and they live there because they like their town and the area. Many families go back generations.

There's something good about going into the local coffee shop and seeing people you know, or taking part in a community event where you know your neighbours.

Imagine if it were discovered that right in the middle of town, there was a deposit of minerals, and authorities decided they were going to give the go-ahead to mine those minerals, and dig an open-pit mine the size of a football field in the downtown core.

That idea probably would not go over well with the townsfolk.

Imagine if it were decided that one of those nice small towns had enough land in the surrounding area to accommodate intensified housing for 100,000 people?

That also would not go over well with locals who would see their tranquil town overrun with traffic and their picturesque community turned into a solid block of concrete.

Development is going to happen, and there's a lot of good in progress, but too much, too fast, is never a good thing.

The area where I live has just received a bombshell announcement from the provincial government.

The region was declared an area of growth by the province several years ago. However, the original plan called for moderate growth in some areas, and no development at all in other areas.

Most residents were content with that plan.

Now, the province has delivered a new proposal ? one that includes development on a massive scale, which blindsided both the town council and local residents.

Most residents were somewhat horrified when they learned the size of the project, and with good reason. The first thought is, traffic alone, after adding 80,000 to 100,000 people, would be a nightmare, in a town that is simply not equipped for it and was never designed to accommodate that scale of population.

Since the plan has no plan to bring industry to the town, thousands of people would have to commute to other areas to work. That would require new highways just to accommodate thousands and thousands of people leaving town every morning.

Then there is the fact that many local residents simply think the town is currently about the right size. It's big enough to have pretty much everything you need, while still maintaining a small-town friendliness.

The first place people turn to when opposed to such ideas is, of course, town hall.

However, many Ontarians don't seem to realize that municipalities in the province have no legal right to self-government.

Local mayors and town councils exist at the pleasure of the province, and the province has the power to remove any mayor and council members and replace them at any time, as it sees fit.

Therefore, local town councils have very limited options on some decisions made by the province, and when the province tells them it is going to build an open-pit mine in the downtown core, there is nothing they can do to prevent it.

Opposition to a provincial plan by local residents must be made at the provincial level.

I don't want to bring any additional heat or headaches to our local MPP. He happens to be a nice guy, engages well with the public, and, I think, is doing a really good job of representing the region and helping his constituents.

However, he is still the provincial representative in the riding and must listen to the will of the people.

If organizers in opposition to this massive development plan get together and convince 25,000 or 30,000 residents to send an email of opposition to the MPP's office and cc the premier, their concerns will get noticed.

After all, if the premier decided to sell his newly acquired private jet, just a day later, due to public pressure and opposition, having the majority of residents of a town contact his office will certainly be a topic of discussion at the next cabinet meeting.