

DEVELOPMENT DREAMS

If it weren't for developers, there wouldn't be anything to dream about would there?

With their spiffy power point presentations, they can paint a picture that transforms a rundown property into the Mona Lisa of buildings. Case in point is the recent proposal for twin towers to transform the back parking area of Hamilton city hall into a state-of-the-art technological hub.

The idea is to construct a 20 and a 24-storey tower, a three-storey podium around the buildings and a 12-storey municipal building where the two-level parking area is now. The development would lay the foundation to create a technology hub that would expand Hamilton's growing technology hub, or so they say.

The attraction is evident. A 2018 report by CBRE found that while Toronto's tech talent pool grew by 54 per cent between 2013 and 2018, other cities have seen impressive gains, including Hamilton. Specialized tech hubs have sprung up such as artificial intelligence in Montreal and Edmonton, ocean-focused tech in Halifax, clean tech in Calgary and automotive in Hamilton and Oshawa.

And while it's exciting to think about what such a development would do for downtown Hamilton and the entire technological sector in the city, will it ever happen?

That is always the question, isn't it when it comes to nailing down those elusive agreements and raising cash for such a complex proposal.

The city put out a call for expressions of interest for the municipal land dominated by the parking area in 2016. In 2017 city officials met with five proponents, but as is always the case nothing happened.

When it comes to development deals and what exactly Hamilton is looking at, the fine print and the lofty dreams don't usually mesh. Take for example the contentious Auchmar Estate. Proponents have come and gone offering ideas on how to redevelop the so-far money-losing property with councillors still shaky on what direction to take for the building and land.

It took years before councillors finally stepped on the gas and approved a \$30-million project to restore the 1923 Lister Block, that a vast majority of activists, councillors and business owners argued was the cause of the Hamilton's downtown decay.

While the Lister Block wasn't the reason for downtown's sordid image, it has certainly led to a redevelopment renaissance for the James Street North area.

There are the still percolating ideas that are happening behind the scenes with FirstOntario Centre and the Hamilton Convention Centre. It has been over a decade of talk among business people, councillors and staff with pretty pictures offered of what could happen to the city's entertainment district.

Maybe this tech hub will become all that has been trumpeted about. A redevelopment oasis that sparks a creative community that launches Hamilton to stratospheric levels. But the reality of what could happen seems more pedestrian.

Developers love to paint wonderful aspirational pictures to eager listeners in the hope that they can get the best deal possible for their clients.

The problem has always been what happens when the public wakes up and confronts the financial and social reality of implementing such a grandiose plan.

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A FITTING TRIBUTE

COLUMNIST GORDON CAMERON CELEBRATES YOUTH



GORDON CAMERON
Column

It was a banner year for the Hamilton Black History Council's John C. Holland Awards as the group recognized 19 youth and five adults amidst a record number of nominees. And while this just goes to show all the wonderful things that are going on in the community, it presents me with a problem in that I can't fit it all in the paper. (So look for more at hamiltonnews.com.)

Hamilton Community News sponsors the Reverend George Horton Scholarship for a student looking for a career in policing. This year's winner Ahmed Sarhan believes that building relationships within com-

munities is a critical component of law enforcement, which will set him in good stead.

Gabriela Roberts won the Marlene Thomas Community Advocacy Award for her role in setting up the Black Student Association at Mac. Kirah Francis received Dejehan Hamilton Tune-In Foundation Arts Award for her passion for the performing and visual arts. Nifemi Adeoye took home the YWCA Girls Rock Award for her commitment to helping others.

Amber Carroll won the Lincoln Alexander Breaking Down Barriers Award for her ability to make change in the world. Vincent Cain received the Selection Chair Conferred Award for sharing his knowledge with his people, as well as youth outside of his race and culture. Sydney Hussett won the Nelson Mandela Social Justice Scholarship for co-founder and President of BlackSpace McMaster.

Evan Morgan received the Dr. Ethilda "Tilley" Johnson Bursary for being a dedicated leader in both his school and community. Daniella Chukwu won the Immigrants Matter Award

for her involvement in her school community. Sterling Seunarine received the Raymond G Lewis Sports Leadership Scholarship Award for his success on the playing fields.

Danait Mulugeta won the Community Matters Scholarship for doing over a thousand hours of volunteer work. Nadiya Nuru-Deen received the Evelyn Myrie Political Action Bursary for her relentless pursuit towards political and social justice.

Winning Youth Achievement Awards were: Abdullah Dwyer for his strong work ethic; Shukri Abdulkawah for her passion for helping young girls; Channele Hutchison for her work as a math tutor, athlete and coach; Sojourn Mark for always giving back and helping others; Monique Kepple for her perseverance and hard work; Rachiel Chirara for being a mature responsible leader; and Chelsea Okyere for being an excellent student and a dedicated musician.

Congratulations to all.

Gordon Cameron is group managing editor for Hamilton Community News.

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TRUTH OR DARE DURING THE PANDEMIC

For the first time in a long time truth and facts seem to be winning the battle over spin and bravado in the ongoing war against the novel coronavirus pandemic.

For every attempt by U.S. President Donald Trump to downplay the impact of the health crisis, or the Chinese government purging vital information from the public, or Thailand threatening to arrest journalists for publishing "fake news," Canadian politicians — including Hamilton's Fred Eisenberger, Ontario Premier Doug Ford and, to a certain extent, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau — have talked about the harsh realities of this deadly virus that has whipsawed our society to a standstill and will most certainly transform how we live and work as we emerge from this long, dark tunnel.

Usually in time of war, the first casualty is truth — an axiom that Trump and other self-serving leaders are proving every day. Yet the reality is, the truth will set the public free.

Over the last few weeks there have been some harsh words from public health officials, politicians and, surprisingly, sports leagues not known for transparency about the impact the virus will have on our lives. Yet as hard-to-hear truths are provided to an eager public willing to absorb the sobering reality, there are some realities that remain hidden from us.

Ontario has become one of only a handful of governments that has been blunt in revealing the potentially devastating impact the virus could have on our loved ones. The possibility that 1,600 deaths could happen in April if further physical distancing efforts are not imposed is something from a horror novel. Yet those dark projections do not go far enough. The federal government, for whatever reason, continues to prevent the release of its own coronavirus modelling numbers, allowing an anxious public to be kept in the dark.

And how will those projected numbers impact Hamilton, and the surrounding area, is a vital fact of which the public remains ignorant. The public has a right to know, as Ford acknowledged, what its future could look like.

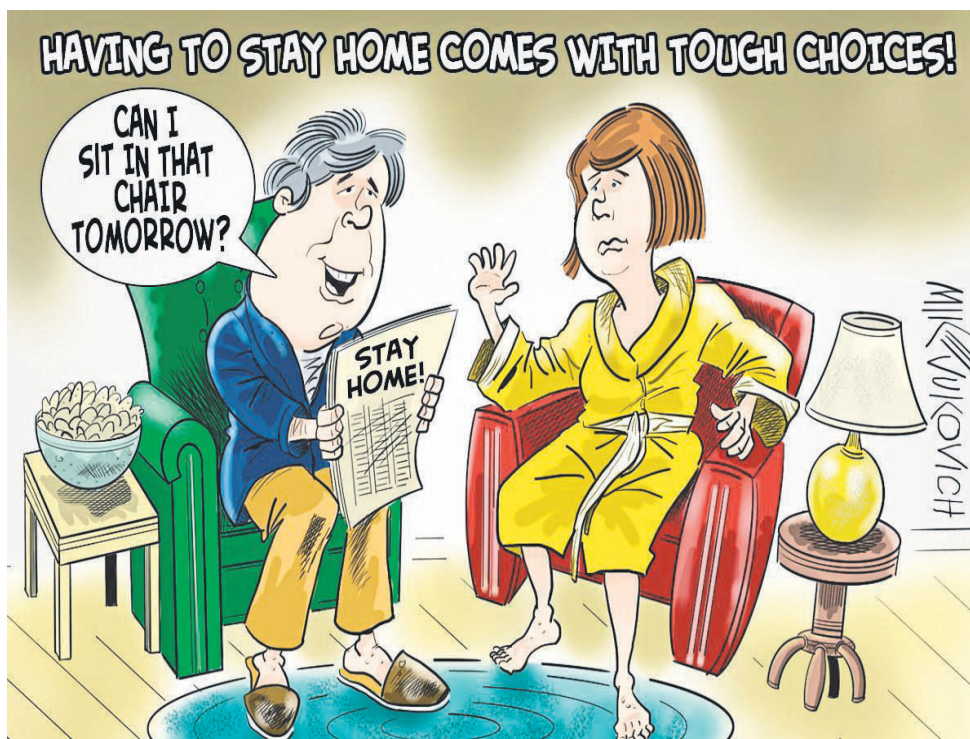
But there are other disturbing secrets that the government, either by reflex, perennial suspicion, or purely because it can, refuses to release. Questions continue to be raised over the accuracy of the public health statistics on who is infected, who has died and who has recovered. At one point local public health units had a better handle on the numbers than the province's own data did.

There are also disturbing indications that hospitals continue to keep secret what plans are in place to handle the expected surge in sick patients.

The Niagara Region Public Health is refusing to release the number of local COVID-19 deaths, arguing victims' privacy trumps the public right to know. Yet the information the organization refuses to reveal is critical to providing insights about infection rates and locations.

The Hippocratic Oath includes the statement, to "abstain from doing harm." During this pandemic, truth can become a weapon to manipulate the public or soothe panicky people whose thirst for knowledge is vital to defeating this health crisis.

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IT'S DIFFERENT NOW

JOURNALISM HAS
CHANGED THESE
DAYS, WRITES
COLUMNIST
GORDON CAMERON



GORDON CAMERON
Columnist

It's about trust. Our relationship with our readers is built on transparency, honesty and integrity. As such, we have launched a trust initiative to tell you who we are and how and why we do what we do. This article is part of that project.

As one of my colleagues rightly pointed out a couple of weeks ago, we're in the middle of the biggest story of our careers. The coronavirus pandemic is unlike anything our journalists have ever dealt with before, and I think it's fair to say that we all hope that we never have to deal with anything like it again.

However, the scale of the

story isn't the only thing that makes this situation unique. For the first time in our long history, we're working without a newsroom.

At first glance, it's easy to underestimate the value of having a place where journalists can gather to work, talk about stories, pass on news tips and even just share a laugh. Even I didn't fully appreciate it until it was gone. After all, our reporters spend a lot of time in the field working independently, and most of my job can be done over a combination of the computer and phone.

But there is magic in a newsroom that no amount of video chats or phone calls can recapture. I miss it, and I believe that the team does as well, but the sheer importance of the stories we're telling keeps us motivated.

After all, it's not often you know that almost everything you write could very likely save someone's life.

Of course, it's not just the lack of a newsroom that changed the way we're re-

porting our stories. Physical distancing means that we're not doing face-to-face interviews, and while we are still occasionally out in our communities, we're relying more on our interview subjects and readers to provide us with photos. Also, given how quickly things are changing, the importance of our website has increased dramatically (as has the number of people reading our stories online).

And our print newspapers aren't going away, and we're continuing to work hard to bring you the best papers we can. We're also taking great care with your health and the health of our carriers, inserters, distributors and printers to ensure that no one gets sick from reading or delivering a newspaper.

Rest assured that no matter how long this pandemic lasts, we'll be right here with the news you need.

Gordon Cameron is the group managing editor for Hamilton Community News.

We welcome your questions and value your comments. Email our trust committee at trust@metroland.com.

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A DEBT STILL TO BE PAID

As Martin Luther King Jr. said in his famous "I Have a Dream" speech there is a promissory note that was written when the white, slaveholding architects of the United States Constitution and the Declaration of Independence stated that "all men, yes black men as well as white men would be guaranteed the unalienable rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

Even though King was referring to the United States, those glorious words can also be used as touchstones for a debt that all colonial governments owe from when they established their global empires. They built their societies on the graves of Indigenous peoples and established a governance structure that inculcated a white power structure that has lasted into the 21st century.

That promissory note contains a sacred obligation of liberty and equality, and diverse communities across the world are now asking those in power to honour it.

The very public death of George Floyd at the hands and knee of a police officer — a familiar icon of an oppressive governing body — is the final straw. Diverse communities across countries are prepared to rise up and demand that promises made so long ago now be paid in full.

Cries to defund police are only one facet of a movement that wants the rules of the game to change. There have been recent minor moves by governments and businesses to address the historical racism and bias that have rigged the economic, political and social environments, but more needs to be done.

Should there be a version of a truth and reconciliation commission in each country as was first done in South Africa to reveal the truth and allow for a reckoning of what has been done to various Indigenous and diverse populations for hundreds of years?

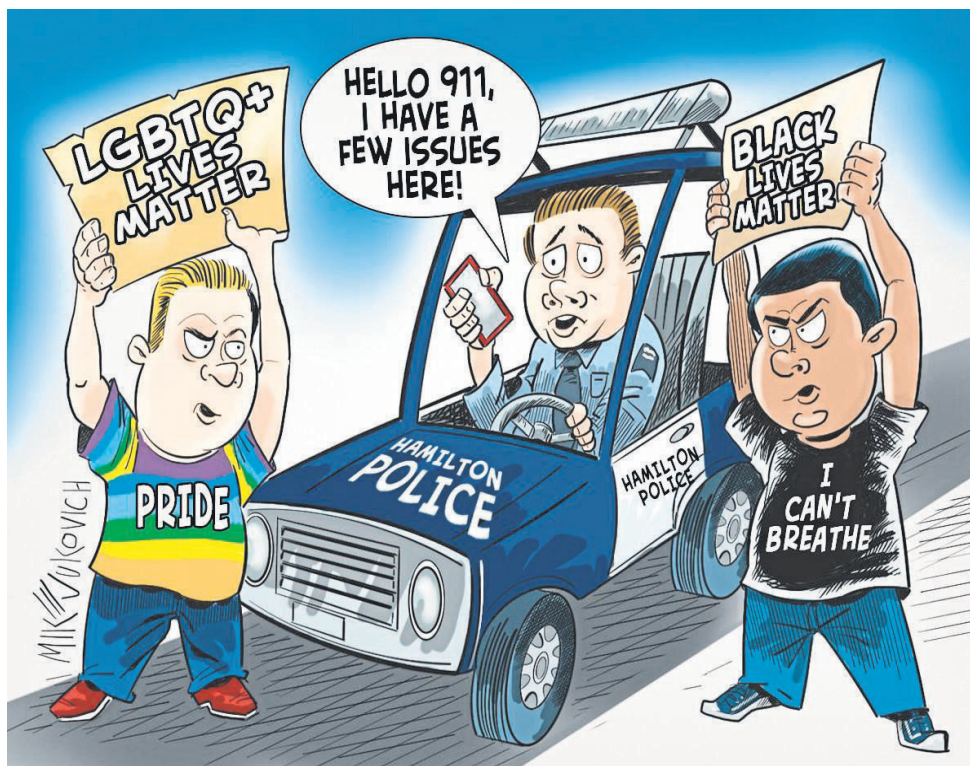
What South Africa discovered is that it takes a long time to talk, absorb and understand how to navigate a complicated past. At the moment, the protests in Canada are more of a scattershot approach to seeking redress; vilifying streets, schools and towns after British figures, or calling for the defunding of police departments.

There needs to be an opportunity to eliminate the constant cycles of retribution, retaliation and violence that has plagued communities as they transform from oppression to true democracy. There needs to be an opportunity for groups, individuals and victims to tell their stories and unburden themselves from the pain and suffering they experienced, before our society pledges to do better and begin the healing process.

For our communities to unite, all groups, and all peoples need a true reconciliation; for peace to endure requires an embrace of our mistakes and a willingness to do better. True reconciliation is supported by a strong foundation of forgiveness.

Only then can we make good on that promissory note, not only to the diverse community who deserve a proper return on their investment for enduring and sacrificing their lives for their country, but also for all people to better understand that a divided country cannot stand.

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STRONG ENOUGH TO LISTEN

COLUMNIST GORDON CAMERON WE HAVE A CHOICE



GORDON CAMERON
Column

I have a good friend who edits a paper in Gettysburg, South Dakota. As you may have guessed, her town is named after the famous American Civil War battle that took place 2,200 km to the east. The area was settled by veterans from both sides, although the ex-Union soldiers outnumbered ex-Confederates. An interesting origin story for the community, but one that doesn't seem worth writing about in a Hamilton paper.

But Gettysburg has been in the news of late for two reasons: 1) It's the home of George Floyd's uncle Selwyn Jones and 2) The local police's uniform shoulder patch design consists of a cannon under-

neath crossed American and Confederate flags.

Needless to say, there has been a fierce debate over the future of the logo (a debate which predates Floyd's death) with many in town arguing that the inclusion of the Confederate flag isn't about hate, but history.

"If I thought for a minute it had something to do with racism that would be a whole different ball game, but it doesn't and it didn't," Gettysburg Mayor Bill Wuttke told the Rapid City Journal earlier in June. "It's just strictly to do with the history of our community."

What struck me most when I read Wuttke's comments is how hard it is for us to put ourselves in someone else's shoes when it comes to looking at uncomfortable topics. That flag is a Rorschach test. When he looks at it he sees his community's founders. While when others look at it they see a symbol of hatred and oppression under which the defenders of the slavery fought to preserve that de-

spicable practice. Between those opposing viewpoints there isn't much room for room for compromise. There's no middle ground.

It's never a comfortable thing to have your beliefs and assumptions challenged. Our natural reaction is to get defensive and to reflexively fight back. However, we have the power to transcend our basic, primal instincts. We can choose to listen to those who we disagree with. We can choose to try and understand their perspective. We can choose to re-evaluate what we think. We can choose to see beyond what we were taught and to let go of things that put more pain into the world than they do joy.

We have the choice. We just need to be strong enough to make it.

Gordon Cameron is the group managing editor for Hamilton Community News. gocameron@hamiltonnews.com

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