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OPINION

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As We See It

No matter who pays for it, do the audit right

IN RECOMMENDING that Council initiate a third-party audit of the Town's purchase of 3.3 acres in East Fonthill, but rejecting developer Rainer Hummel's offer to pay for it, Mayor David Augustyn is appealing to a powerful democratic ideal. "It is ethically inappropriate," he writes, "to accept the \$50,000 because it sets an unacceptable precedent of granting wealth great influence and privilege in municipal decision-making."

Augustyn's point is seductive because he seems to be saying, "We won't let wealthy individuals unduly influence political actions," a position with which everyone who believes in "one person, one vote" surely agrees.

But there is show-stopping hypocrisy in the Mayor's argument.

For some months now the Town has actively solicited money from wealthy individuals—\$3 million dollars worth of it, to be precise. In return, these wealthy individuals (and corporations) have been offered naming rights to parts of the new Community Centre. A sit-

ting member of Pelham Town Council personally contributed \$300,000, and will see a banquet room named after him and his wife. This same Councillor

For some months now the Town has actively solicited money from wealthy individuals

and his wife have recently added to their real estate holdings in Pelham, and the Councillor has told the Voice that he is considering seeking a variance to build a residential complex on one such lot. The Councillor says that he will, of course, declare a conflict of interest and leave Council chambers during debate on the matter. But is it credible that his status, and his \$300,000 payment to the Town, may not in some measure grant him

"influence and privilege in municipal decision-making"?

Other major donors to the Community Centre, such as a large local insurance agency, and a multi-million-dollar technology company on Highway 20, might one day need their own variances—or seek to solicit Town business in the future. Democracy says that their cash gifts won't matter. Reality wonders otherwise.

The only real difference between accepting cash for the Community Centre and accepting cash for an audit is a matter of perception: Funding the Centre is good; examining the books is bad.

Ironically, in recommending that an audit take place, Augustyn has already allowed Hummel to influence Town decision-making. The Mayor asserts that Town staff do not fear an audit, yet considering all the foot-dragging to date, it is abundantly clear that the Town would not now be seeking an audit if left to its own devices.

On the red herring of

See AS WE SEE IT back page

What's that awful stink?



Letters

Why take out saplings along 12 Mile Creek?

Sulphur Springs Road is arguably the prettiest one-lane road you'll have the good fortune to walk in the entire Niagara region.

This is largely due to the clearest, coldest babbling creek, affectionately known as the 12 Mile, that flows along the side of the road.

Sadly, two major rainfalls have caused havoc for property owners as well as those folks who used to take Sunday afternoon drives along Sulphur Springs. Erosion is the dirty seven-letter word down here in the valley.

Here's my beef, and I'm not alone with this.

Why were over 100 trees and shrubs cut down a few weeks back, along the banks of

the 12 Mile?

The west end of Sulphur Springs took a beating and the other area, just east of the road closure, lost a few dozen too. The saplings were from one to three inches in diameter, and were hacked off by a side-cutter attached to a tractor.

This company was hired by the Town of Pelham to cut off vegetation, not trees. These trees are now dead, and their important role of securing the banks is extinguished.

Please, Town Hall, be informed of the importance of preserving our trees along waterways throughout our beloved Pelham.

Lynncy Powell
Pelham

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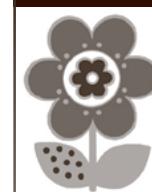
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BOPPLE

continued from Page 1

this season, so it was time to do something epic. My longest previous ride this year had been 125 kilometers of rolling Kitchener hills, with the wind at my back. The Highlander sounded like the challenge I needed.

That's how I wound up with almost 500 other slightly unhinged cyclists at the starting line of the Highlander Cycle Tour. Reflecting, while waiting to roll off line at Bristol Mountain Ski Resort south of Rochester, I had to wonder how I expected that any event involving pedaling that starts at the base of a ski hill could be fun.

The Finger Lakes lie in glacial scars stretched between mountains that form the foothills of the Catskills, and the scenery is gorgeous. Forested landscapes just beginning to display fall colours, classic hillside farms emulating Vermont, grand vistas over the lakes, and wineries are everywhere. None of which matters a lick when your legs are burning and you're gasping for breath on brutal uphills. Or your knuckles are white, your knees are squeezing the top bar of your bike for dear life, and your thighs have a death grip on the seat as you hit 70 kilometres per hour on a terrifying downhill.

The route began with four or five



Bopple Hill Cemetery.

JOHN SWART PHOTO

flat warm-up kilometers along the base of the valley, then turned right up the first mountain, a 365-metre delight to the Village of Cheshire. Next it dropped 200 metres to Duell Road, then climbed another 400 metres prior to descending into Bristol Springs on the sweetest pavement in New York State. Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus. Three thousand metres of climbing guarantees 3000 metres of downhill.

By the 140-kilometre mark, our second winds had

come and gone, yet everyone knew there had to be one last outrageous climb, and the organizers didn't disappoint. It was a newly constructed road with a wide shoulder, a steep but constant grade, and it went up and up forever. Definitely not the stairway to heaven.

When I rode by my second 30-something pushing his bike, one of them shoeless because his swollen feet wouldn't fit into his cycling shoes any longer (truth), I felt pretty smug. That lasted until near the top when a goddess on two wheels blew by me, slowing just long enough to shout, "I'll be doing the Marathon for free! I'll be doing the Marathon for free!"

Lucky her.

AS WE SEE IT

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"influence," however, Hummel's wealth is irrelevant. Hummel's credibility rests not in his bank account but in his business acumen. Hummel's challenges against the Town revolve not around his own money or how much of it he has, but taxpayers' money and whether the Town has mishandled it.

In recommending an audit, Augustyn is accepting that Hummel's allegations have influenced the Town. Why, then, does he reject Hummel's and the Region's Terms of Reference (i.e., what to audit) and his offer to pay?

It seems that the Mayor is willing to accept only a certain amount of Hummel's influence. Hummel's questions may have prompted the audit, but if the Town insists on paying for it, then only the Town gets to decide what's examined.

The Terms of Reference of an audit determine what auditors will investigate. If the Corleone family commissioned a third-party audit and the Terms of Reference concerned only its grocery bills, then even Don Vito himself could walk off with a clean bill of financial health.

For his part, Hummel says that in order to be legitimate any audit the

Town commissions needs to be done in accordance with the Terms of Reference that the Region recommends. If the Town agrees to these conditions, and the audit indicates that all is well in our town of \$928,000-per-acre land valuations, then we call on Hummel to pledge his \$50,000 to the Community Centre instead. (Perhaps the security system could be christened in his name.)

In this issue we provide guidance on the proper scope for the audit, and what questions must be answered by Council and staff in order to retain the public's trust. These questions were determined in consultation with various authorities on finance and accounting from within and outside the Region. Unfortunately, as we go to press Monday night, it appears that Council will once again bend to the Mayor's will and decide to prove the obvious, decide to commission an audit of the grocery bill only.

If, as the Mayor assures us, there is nothing improper to be found, then the Town has only Hummel's \$50,000 donation to gain by provided full and truthful answers to the questions that appear on page 5. However, no matter the result of Monday's vote, Council can still decide to do the right thing.