Privileging Homeowners at Wards Road: A mean-spirited act during Covid-19.

It was a surprise to find new No Stopping signs covering the entirety of the public road leading to the Public Beach at Wards Road. According to the enforcement officers this new parking restriction will be in force until October 31 and then reassessed according to the pandemic situation. I further understand that the real reason for closure of the road was related to complaints from homeowners whose properties abut the public access road.

An enforcement officer told me that vandals had defecated on private property and cars had blocked driveways, hence the need for road restrictions. I have visited the beach regularly for 33 years and I have never seen any evidence of the aforesaid. When I asked about parking accommodations for disabled or frail members of the public, he told me that it was probably safe to park there during the week. I do not believe members of the public should be required to undertake acts of civil disobedience to use the designated public swim area during low-usage times.

I do not understand the connection between complaints of property owners and the closure of the road to public traffic and parking. Making such an association is an overreach from a legal perspective. From a social justice and ethical perspective, it is an act of uncaring by both complainants and adjudicators. Abled-bodied people can bike to the beach or park in more distant neighborhoods and walk to the beach. It is the most vulnerable people and families with young children who are cut off entirely from using this public area. Maintaining the mental health of all people is a priority during the long-haul of the Covid-19 crisis. Currently, the by-law is so limiting that one cannot drive down the road because there is no stopping and therefore no opportunity to make a three point turn. The irony of the matter is that, to park legally, one has to cross Highway 26 to park beside other properties. Does council take the view that those homes are not as important as the ones near the beach? Because the by-law change is falsely linked to Covid-19 there is a concern that it will become permanent after October 31. That would mean that reasonable access would be denied and the complainants would have a private road, maintained at public cost, to their residences.

According to the Covid-19 Public Health Guidance for Public Beaches, “Current research suggests that risk of transmission from recreational waters is very low.”
When users of public beaches use social distancing, visits to the beach keep up morale during this pandemic time. In fact guidance recommends that visitors to a public beach should use the one closest to home.

If I might offer some advice to the waterfront homeowners who complained: Enjoy your properties with their beautiful vistas and let the public enjoy the small stretch of the lovely beach accorded to them. Report any property damage to the police but do not assume users of the public beach caused it or that the criminal or tortuous acts of a few individuals justify effectively closing a public beach to the public. If that is not satisfactory to you, buy an Island where you are ensured privacy.

My first step is to share these concerns with Council members and to receive feedback. I ask that the change of by-law be withdrawn or allowed to lapse as of October 31. As a taxpayer I request a meeting at the Committee of Adjustment to contest the enactment of this by-law. I am so committed to redress this injustice that I am prepared to circulate petitions and publish letters in the newspapers. August, 2020, is a time for kindness and generosity and not the entrenchment of privilege.