

## The Origins of the URA

*By Ken Ackles*

In 1969 we moved into a new home on Markhaven Rd. in Varley Village (the first subdivision) in the quaint "Police Village" (an early form of municipal government) of Unionville. There was no home mail delivery (like now) and we all had to collect our mail from the Post Office on Main Street Unionville. Everyone seemed to be quite happy with this arrangement as we could meet our neighbours while picking up our mail, although there was quite a little traffic jam around 5 pm. Some months later, we were all notified that Canada Post was going to re-number all our home addresses, using a giant grid system linking us to the numbering system being introduced on Highway 7. This would mean that instead of our house being #23 on a street of about 40 homes, it would be 5xxx, which made no sense at all. We also learned that our local Councillor supported the change. Neighbours started talking to neighbours and soon it was clear that we would have to organize in order to fight this renumbering scheme. We called a meeting of our concerned neighbours and the Unionville Ratepayers Association was born. Our first president and leader was Alita Burgess and I joined her on the executive. Since the renumbering never occurred, I assume that we were not the only dissenters. One of the first things I remember the URA doing was to organize a Bicycle Safety Event for children.

Another organization was formed to fight the widening of Main Street Unionville to 4 lanes. This became the Unionville Conservation Society which successfully brought about the Unionville Bypass on Kennedy Road by organizing the Unionville Festival, to demonstrate to all, the unique character of our Main Street. The Unionville Conservation Society organized the Festival for many of the following years and also actively encouraged commercial development on Main Street Unionville. I was one of the last presidents of this Society in 1977-78.

*Harry Eaglesham takes up the story.....*

In the early 1990s, when the newly elected Bob Rae government was seeking a new dump site, the old Beckett Farm site was on the list for consideration. It was my first time on the board and John Paloc was President. The URA did a lot of door to door canvassing to protest the plan and membership swelled beyond 1200 households. The farm was subsequently sold to developers for \$100 million in 2009.

After several years of inactivity from about 2003 (no members, no meetings, no communications) the URA was restarted in 2007 by 3 Directors (Richard Talbot, Harry Eaglesham and Wes Rowe) of the Unionville Villagers Association (UVA). The primary motive was concern that growing population density in Markham Centre was proceeding without awareness of the Unionville community just to the north. Also that the name Unionville was about to disappear as an address recognized by Canada Post and action had to be taken to get Unionville postal codes recognized as such. UVA was focused on historic Unionville matters and felt a revived URA would be best to follow broader issues. With encouragement from Councilor Joe Virgilio, URA had new life.

From a fledgling restart with a handful of members, the organization grew back quickly to the 500 member (households) range with Markham Centre and controversial traffic calming being the subject of several door to door flyer campaigns and packed URA and Council meetings. Conducting all-candidate meetings also contributed to URA visibility. The Association was renamed Unionville Residents Association in 2019 to better reflect its mission.