

Getting It Straight

Road Markings

J.J. Hilsinger - 09/23/2003

If you're stupid enough to drink and drive, then Sault Ste. Marie is the safest place to do it. The road markings in this city are so crooked that if you're asked to walk the line, no one will know you've been imbibing. I've seen the lines veer as much as two feet off directional before swinging to the other side of the true line in an ongoing flirtation with the notion of straight.

Look down the lines as you drive all over the city you'll see crooked lines on main thoroughfares, on side streets and on your favourite country road. The streets look like they were painted by a drunk. What gives? After all, the original lines that were painted over appear to be straight. The painter only had to follow them.

The "directional line" symbolism is too acute to ignore.

I believe, as many do, that our city has been wavering like the painted road markings for the past 15 to 20 years, unable to focus. We've become known more for our ability to generate bad news than for our ability to be a forward thinking, dynamic part of a new Canadian reality.

The city is riddled with dissent. It seems politicians would rather battle each other than seek consensus on good ideas. It seems they think that their personal feistiness is what it takes to make a difference, or that their own backyard takes precedence over developing a vibrant city. They have difficulty comprehending a bigger picture.

Bureaucrats march to their own uninspired drummer, their self-anointed Commander-in-chief.

The residents of Sault Ste. Marie are very much to blame for years of mediocrity. Many of them supported and celebrated the distortions. If they didn't know then, they recognize now, the misalignment. Perhaps they closed their thoughts and eyes and hoped that the lines would re-align on their own. Or were they intimidated, observing the personal battles and forced isolation of those who tried to straighten the lines. Did they the just disconnect?

I've never seen crooked lines in any other community. Why here?

Is it a quality thing? You could say that a community that is proud of its rusted, paint peeled welcome sign on Hwy 17 North might also be proud of crooked road lines.

Is it a political thing? You could say that as long as politicians ignore the root causes of our problems, there will always be a crooked road to follow.

Is it a new community marketing thing? You could say the wavy road lines represent the Whitefish Island rapids and the theme of our logo, "Naturally Gifted."

In general, it seems that our policy makers always check what other cities are doing to find the lowest achievers or the least imaginative average before proposing something new in this city.

~~So, herein, lies the conundrum I can't find crooked lines anywhere else. Wait now! Have we been smitten?~~
Could this be an "innovative" or "visionary" [sorry for the swear word] thing?

Our city has tremendous natural potential if we could only clean up the debris, use our brains and come together.

That's a tall order!

These articles are intended as a series of presentations and I welcome and encourage your ideas and perspectives as they proceed. There's a lot of ying and yang, so fasten your seat belts while I express the good and the bad and attempt to propose solutions.

We Paved Paradise and Put Up A Parking Lot

J.J. Hilsinger - 10/20/2003

This past summer, I bicycled around most of the city. There are many beautiful residential areas, but most of the commercial areas are the pits.

Even those who reside in economy housing have taken great pride in their premises and the interface with the streetscape. Why don't some business establishments show the same pride?

Obviously personal values are not being transcribed into broader based community values. There is no effective public push to make this happen. Our residential areas are very high quality. Our commercial areas are very low quality.

While some places like McDonald's and Algoma's Water Tower Inn spend liberally on landscaping, other businesses sharing the same commercial neighbourhood don't seem to care. Others do a decent job then install intrusive portable signs to blot out their nicely designed landscaping display. There's only one way to overcome this harmful inconsistency - city bylaws peppered with peer review and lots of encouragement.

However, until the city decides that "naturally gifted" is not a hyped planning and development slogan but a unique inheritance from mother earth that we MUST honour, we'll continue "to pave paradise and put up a parking lot." This attitude won't help improve the Lifestyle Industry to consequently attract new business. In fact, over time it will detract from repeat visits.

It also won't help impress new visitors and entrepreneurs with our liveable lifestyle. They can get better elsewhere because rather than see us through our positive values, their perceptions will include "Strip-Zone-Squalor". If you as a resident say that you don't give a damn, then at the same time you forfeit quality lifestyle and higher re-sale values for your home.

We have the opportunity to build CANADA'S NATURAL LIFESTYLE CITY; a city that overflows with recreational and cultural amenity, a great place to build a home and a business. If some of the ideas put on the table twenty years ago had been acted upon, we'd likely be there by now.

Consider the main routes from downtown to Great Northern Rd. to Hwy 17 north and east. What are the elements that create a well-planned city that respects the natural environment? Where does the consciousness begin that policies follow? Environmental elements, trees, rocks, water and natural beauty are going to be in great demand in the new century for vacations and for opportunities to build enterprise. Our city can soar again, if we can lift our minds to the challenge because...

WE TALK LOTS, DO LITTLE AND SELDOM GET IT STRAIGHT!
What do you think of the idea of Canada's Natural Lifestyle City?