

## Five minutes is not enough time to speak at budget meetings

**(Re: The People's Choice, Brock's Banter, March 20)**

In your editorial, you lament the fact that very few residents participate in budget sessions of Town Council.

I am one who has participated in the past and have attempted to participate, as a member of the Trails and Active Transportation Committee (TATC). To state that it has been difficult to be taken seriously in my attempts is understating reality.

This time I asked to have a budget-related item placed on the agenda of the TATC, among other items. The meeting was cancelled, over my strongly-worded objection, as it was deemed "not required." No explanation was given.

Based on my previous experiences, I made no further attempts to participate in the budget process, much out of character with my usual persistence. Let me explain why:

On occasions when I do attend the budget sessions and Council meetings, I am given five minutes to present my suggestion and relevant background information. That is indeed sufficient to convey my main point, if there is only one, but very often not enough time to explain the context, especially when such concerns deal with a matter which has not previously been on record, or been considered by Council or staff.

I then have to wait until the item is being discussed. That can take hours. But, the potentially lengthy wait time is not really of greatest concern to me. It is the fact the discussion takes place without my ever having another opportunity to rebut what is being introduced as arguments that serve to defeat, or modify my request for budget dollars.

I have often additional information which can serve to enlighten Councillors on concerns which I had not foreseen. I have only five minutes to set out supportive information and deal with anticipated concerns. The fact I am not being welcomed to make additional comments after having heard the Councillors' concerns, I perceive as cavalier treatment of my input.

What the Chair of the Budget Session should take into consideration is the capacity of the resident to speak intelligently on the subject and to have to be respectful. A supplemental time slot for speaking should be allowed, after all Councillors have commented in full, for and against, and before a vote is taken.

In the absence of respectful treatment of the citizens and their ideas, it should surprise no one that participation of the public, in the budget sessions, will remain abysmally low.

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