

BROCK'S BANTER: Changing lightbulbs by committee

By Brock Weir

Most of us learn very early on ? and often the hard way ? that pleasing everyone is an impossible task.

No matter how hard you try, it is just not going to happen. Nevertheless, people do try to do just that, usually overextending themselves in the process, and having absolutely nothing to show for it.

We see it everywhere, whether you are trying to go the extra mile when it comes to customer service, making sure each client (whatever your work situation) gets equal attention, ensuring there is enough money to go around for everyone's pet projects when it comes to mapping out a budget (government, household, or otherwise), and making whatever reality you're trying to create 100 per cent inclusive.

Take, for instance, the occasional hubbub surrounding Canada's 150th Anniversary.

Up until relatively recently, it would have been safe to refer to the commemoration as a ?celebration? but as we get closer to the date of the main event on Canada Day, there are increased calls to look on the milestone another way.

Many of them are, of course, perfectly valid.

For our First Nations, for instance, the burgeoning nationhood stemming from a Colonial power is not necessarily one of the first reasons to come to mind when thinking about bringing out the bunting, not to mention the residual effects of that which continue to linger to this day.

Others argue there are numerous other ways Canada needs to get its house in order before the stage is set for a proper celebration.

Still others do not find what is planned overall to be fully representative of a multicultural nation, while another faction of people, apparently still smarting from the outcome of the Seven Years War, particularly what transpired on the Plains of Abraham back in 1759, would rather not raise a glass for reasons which they typically concentrate into a pithy letter to the editor in national newspapers. (Invariably sometime between?. Canada Day and Hallowe'en)

As the saying goes, the road to hell is paved with good intentions, as recently witnessed around the Council table with Councillor Gaertner's long-standing motion calling for the Town to use the tools at its disposal to ?appreciate diversity? across the board, including ?global events that further LGBTQ rights, human rights, and serve to assist in the elimination of discrimination of any kind.?

The motion went a step further to note these events ?include ? but are not limited to ? Pride Week, the Town of Aurora Multicultural Festival, International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, Black History Month, Asian Heritage Month, and International Women's Day.?

Sounds all well and good, right? Wrong, apparently.

The well-intentioned motion ran perilously close to dying on the table when it started to get dissected and other elected officials started throwing further ? and not necessarily complementary ? ingredients into the pot. Suggestions included provisions for persons of all abilities, emulating the more specific and wider net cast by the Ontario Human Rights Code over the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and a provision to protect ?religious rights? which, in a motion looking to celebrate the LGBTQ community and Pride Week, could be considered by some to leave the door open to contradiction.

This last minute addition to the recipe was thankfully ? and cannily ? revised by Councillor Gaertner to read ?religious celebrations,? but it just underscored how things can snowball in efforts to please everyone.

The principle was also highlighted last week over continued discussions on whether or not Aurora should do away with more traditional paper ballots counted by tabulator in favour of a new system whereby eligible voters would be able to have their say anywhere they are connected to the internet.

Addressing Councillor Pirri's musing on what problem adopting internet voting might be trying to solve, Councillor Mrakas ventured that the problem can be summed up with a benefit: being able to overcome barriers currently in place to voters who might not be able to make it to the polling place for any number of reasons, including physical ability and ill health.

?We strive under our strategic plan to look to improve and provide ?an exceptional quality of life' to our residents,? he said, noting that this fits the bill. ?That is why I think this is important for us to move forward. It is not just because we're progressing and moving forward, it is about doing it to improve the quality of life for our residents and that is what we're supposed to be doing here. ?At the end of the day, there are risks any which way we vote. If we sit here and wait until we get to 100 per cent, we're going to be waiting longer to institute online voting compared to how long it has taken to do Library Square. It is the right thing to do for the quality of life for our residents.?

Councillor Kim, on the other hand, had another point of view.

'I am not sure that making the quality of life good for one aspect of society is necessarily at the expense of another aspect of society,' Councillor Kim offered. 'Frankly, it might be reverse discrimination. I have talked to people who have said they like going as a family to make an hour out of it. They like writing [their choice] down with a pen and putting it into the ballot box. There is a significant amount of people who prefer that method.

'We're taking an option away from them, so that another segment of the population can have more convenience and comfort. I don't discount that, but we need to value all aspects of society. If we're going to respect everyone then we might as well go for a hybrid method and spend that extra money.'

A hybrid model would see two voting systems running concurrently, an option which staff have said will cost considerably more than either the current tabulator system we have now or the internet model being proposed.

Sure, a hybrid model would provide a maximum number of options to voters, but voters are also, by and large, taxpayers. Would the taxpayers be content with a more expensive option simply because some might get a bit of a thrill over taking a pencil in hand, shading in a box, and making a family outing out of it?

Despite spending the extra money to give all voters their preferred option, I don't think anyone would dispute that a significant portion of electors vote according to their bottom line, rendering this attempt to make everyone happy dead on arrival.

Although some families might like to make an evening of hanging around their polling station, giving them a more convenient method to cast their vote is not discrimination, reverse or otherwise; not breaking down already identified barriers blocking some constituents from casting their vote might come pretty darn close, particularly when there is a solution at hand.