

FRONT PORCH PERSPECTIVE: Engaging our Citizens

By Stephen Somerville

I was all set to write that this community seems increasingly willing to be governed by the few (who vote, that is).

I was going to list the ever declining voter turnout for all levels of government as the key piece of evidence to support my contention.

Municipal voter turnout was down over three per cent from the last election.

Only 35.74 per cent of us voted. Shameful!

Also witness what occurred concerning the two ballot questions that voters were asked to consider during the last municipal election.

The first question asked if the number of Councillors, excluding the Mayor, should be reduced to six from eight. 65 per cent of the 12,000 plus voters supported this initiative. The problem was that the 12,000 plus voters in favor of this initiative only comprised 33 per cent of the electorate; 50 per cent of eligible voters are required to make the ballot question a reality.

The second question asked if you support a ward system, where candidates are divided up geographically. Only 45 per cent were in support of this initiative, so again, it did not pass.

This is not great when you know that Mayor Dawe and his newly elected Council have a number of important decisions that they need to make, including what to do with the \$35M Hydro Reserve, improvements on Yonge Street, keeping a lid on tax increases and the like.

These types of decisions really do impact the quality of life in our community and we should - collectively - take our civic duty more seriously.

This writer believes that we should adopt mandatory voting or, at the very least, offer an incentive, like say ?\$X? off next year's property tax bill for those who cast a vote.

However, just when I thought our community does not care, I realized that they can be mobilized for two types of endeavors; volunteering for something, or when an issue does affect them specifically.

We have all seen the success of Rib Fest, the Santa Claus parade or the Haunted Forest. It seems that we need a fun family activity to get people interested enough to assist.

I have also seen families at the churches in town work together to help someone or to support an initiative.

We also take action when a particular item affects our community or a neighborhood.

Look no further than the Highland Gate issue. It has been estimated that over 370 people came out to an impromptu meeting a couple of weeks back.

Hopefully, the Highland Gate community (and, if need be, Aurora Council) can work with ClubLink, the owner of the Highland Gate golf course, on a solution that accommodates both sides.

This brings me back to the \$35M in Hydro Funds.

While the Mayor and Council have been duly elected and are responsible for the ultimate decision regarding the Hydro Funds, they should solicit feedback on this issue.

The Council might not receive a lot of responses nor have many people attend a meeting, but a few or even one well thought out idea could prove helpful.

One thought would be to take say 25 per cent of the \$35M and use it for some type of recreational use that can be enjoyed by everyone.

This could mean the Town using the \$8.75M to purchase land and potentially keep it as a park for everyone.

Alternatively, Town Council could come up with a number of ideas, boil these down to a manageable number and then have citizens provide their input.

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