

FRONT PORCH PERSPECTIVE: Replacing Ballard

By Stephen Somerville

Town Council is again facing the task of appointing someone in light of former Councillor Chris Ballard's recent election as the Liberal MPP for Newmarket-Aurora.

We should know by the end of the month who the Council has appointed.

This is the third time in the last few years that Aurora has faced this issue and we can learn from these experiences.

Back in 2012, Aurora-King's new Trustee on the York Region District School Board was named.

Peter Adams-Luchowski was appointed by the Board over eighteen other candidates, including Aurora's Dave Williams, who finished second in the last Trustee election.

A number of people ? including yours truly ? were shaking their heads over why Mr. Adams-Luchowski, who resided in Richmond Hill at the time, was appointed to fill a position to represent Aurora-King's interests.

Don't get me wrong: based on what I had read, Mr. Adams-Luchowski had an abundance of experience and knowledge of the issues as he was a former Trustee in Richmond Hill and he would more than likely serve us well.

However, a by-election should have been called to replace the departing Gord Kerr, who resigned in January 2012.

I also concur with Aurora Mayor Dawe's sentiments expressed in this paper at the time when he stated that ?The second best thing, in my opinion, would be to appoint the person who was clearly the second place person. Mr. Williams was within 400 votes of winning. Granted, there were only two candidates and he still garnered 6,000 votes.?

Sure, a by-election could cost about \$60,000 (my guess). Based on 55,000 Aurora residents and 20,000 King residents, this works out to eighty cents per person; pretty cheap price to pay for democracy.

With the term still having over two years to run, it doesn't make sense to appoint someone, even if the appointed individual has served as a Trustee in the past.

If the term had only one year or less to go, then this would be a plausible option. If that were the case, then appointing someone would probably be a good idea, with the proviso that the appointed person would first agree not to run in the subsequent election. While I imagine that the learning curve is steep for the first timers, with over two years left to go, there is at least enough time to get in, become comfortable with the responsibilities of the job, and make a contribution before the end of the term.

This reminds me of the situation we had back in 2008 when then first term Aurora Councillor Grace Marsh resigned her seat.

A special council meeting was called and the Council declared Mrs. Marsh's seat vacant.

At that emergency meeting, Town Clerk Bob Panizza told Council that they had three options: Councillors could vote to appoint a person to Council, take the next finisher from the last election or call a by-election.

A motion to fill the seat via a by-election was then defeated after a 4-4 vote.

They then appointed John Gallo, who was the runner up from the 2006 election. He finished ninth out of a crowded field of twenty candidates in that election. And he did answer the bell when the election was actually called back then ? that has to be worth something, you would think.

This time, Council is employing a simple and open process whereby anyone can put their name forward for the position. I applaud Council for doing this, although I am still wrestling with the fact that the appointed person can run in the municipal election this fall.

What concerns me more, however, is that we should be putting some guidelines in place for Board Members and at local Council.

As it stands, the Board and Council have a couple of choices when a locally elected Trustee/Councillor resigns or is incapacitated.

I'm not talking about taking the power out of the hands of the Board Trustees or Councillors; they were elected by us to make decisions, but having some guidelines would mean that everyone knows the state of play.

Here are my suggestions:

How about in the circumstance where someone who leaves in the first year of a four-year Trustee or Council mandate, the next place finisher is appointed. For someone who leaves after year one but before year three, a by-election is held. For a resignation in the last year of a four-year term, then appoint either one of the candidates who were successful last time, or a former Councillor if none of the candidates from last time want to do it, with the proviso that this person cannot seek the same office in the next election.

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