

POLITICS AS USUAL: Stay Tuned!

By Alison Collins-Mrakas

I was stuck for an idea for a column this week ? not because I don't have anything to say, but because what I want to discuss I cannot.

I would love to talk about a few issues before the current Council, but alas, I am required to refrain from expressing my opinion given that my husband is a Councillor. Rats!

So, I will turn my focus on other levels of government ? in particular, our Regional Government. Regional Council gets rather short shrift, in my opinion, both from media and from residents.

Why, you might ask? Well, it's because unless you don't have a day job, and thus have oodles of time to sit around in their monolithic chambers, there's really no way for you to be informed, or even aware of what transpires during a Regional Council meeting.

They are not broadcast on Rogers (like Aurora or Newmarket). They are streamed (as of May 2014), but only while the meeting is on ? which is 9.30 to noonish on the third Thursday of the month. And apparently only audio streaming, not video. So, I guess you just have to guess who is speaking at any given time.

Also, the audio feed of the meetings are not archived. So, if you can't listen to the meeting at 9.30 a.m., then you're out of luck. There's no way to review it later.

So, there you have it. The level of government responsible for arguably half our taxes provides no real means for the average hard-working taxpayer to become informed as to what exactly they are up to.

It begs the question: why not? Why aren't the meetings televised and rebroadcast after supper hour?

I guess because for the most part it would be more exciting watching paint dry, so why bother airing hours of the tedium? Fair enough. But shouldn't we get to decide whether we want to watch a meeting and be bored silly or not?

I, for one, would like to be able to watch the Regional Council meetings. I would like to know how the items on the agenda are deliberated. There are a number of very important looking issues before the Council. Yes, I read the agendas and whatever materials are made public in advance. More on that later.

However, the only records of how the matters before Council are deliberated are the minutes. And - no offence to the hardworking staff ? the minutes are useless if one is looking for insight as to how a matter has been discussed and decided upon. Minutes are not a verbatim record. They are a record of motions and votes.

We don't even have a way of knowing how our own ? and only - Regional representative ? the Mayor ? votes. Unless the vote is recorded, we will not know if or when he supports a particular motion on the floor much less what he thinks about it.

Given that half the various Regional representative's time is ostensibly spent addressing Regional matters on behalf of, and in service to, the residents of their respective municipalities, I believe as taxpayers we should know what their views are on all matters before the Regional Council.

A dry, once monthly, Regional report to their Councils does little to inform residents. It is too high level. We need a bit more meat. More detail. And that only comes from direct knowledge of the proceedings.

To that end, I will now be covering Regional Council meetings starting this month. So stay tuned!

Until next week, stay informed, stay involved because this is ? after all ? Our Town.