

## POLITICS AS USUAL: Ranked Ballots

By Alison Collins-Mrakas

If the Province has its way, the 2018 municipal election could be markedly different than in 2014.

On April 4, the Province announced that it intends to introduce legislative amendments to the Municipal Elections Act that would, if passed, give municipalities the option of using ranked ballots in future municipal elections.

The province defines ranked balloting as, allowing a voter to rank candidates in order of preference ? first choice, second choice, third choice etc.

Right off the bat, I have two concerns. The first is that the proposed changes are only proposed changes. The final version of the amended Act may be somewhat different, or it may fall by the wayside entirely if other issues are deemed to be more important. So, we shall see what shakes out in the end.

My second concern is the proposed amendments, if passed, are permissive not obligatory. That means that each municipality can choose for itself whether it wants to adopt said changes. Personally, I believe that legislation should be universally applied so as to ensure the same set of rules applies to every candidate and the same options afforded to every voter.

Having a hodge-podge of voting processes across the province will defeat the purpose of the proposed revisions.

Any change to the Municipal Election Act that moves us forward ? even by an inch ? would be wonderful and the Province should be commended for taking steps to start examining the election process as a whole within the context of the very real limits to accessible government the current legislation represents.

However, in looking at the summary of the comments provided by the many residents, politicians, and municipal employees that responded to the call for comments during the public review of the Act in May through July of 2015, I am curious as to why the province focused, essentially, on a ranked ballot system.

The province reports that, "Most public input favoured allowing municipalities the option of using ranked ballots for future municipal elections. Many submissions stressed the importance of including a public consultation component in the ranked ballot framework." Not all submissions from municipal councils addressed ranked ballots. Those that did were divided in support or opposition.

With greatest respect, that does not sound like a ringing endorsement for ranked ballots.

In fact, it sounds like the complete opposite.

Thus, I am unclear why the province would proceed with this proposed amendment when there are other much more important changes that many people would like to see implemented; the most obvious being changes to how you vote ? and in particular the option of online voting. Many folks have been clamouring for that option for years.

In looking at the summary comments page, the province reports that "the most consistent recommendation for greater accessibility in municipal elections was to increase the use of alternative voting methods, including telephone and internet (online) voting."

Thus, if the most consistent comment they heard was about the use of phone or internet voting, why is that not the focus of the proposed changes? Online voting is being used right now in the by-election in Whitby, so why is it not an option at the municipal level?

Considerably greater consultation is required amongst residents, councilors and legislators alike about what changes are needed. The province has acknowledged this, indicating that there are recognized concerns about "ranked ballot implementation including logistical challenges related to changing voting systems and challenges around voter education and understanding."

Again, changes are needed. First past the post is not the most democratic method of deciding who governs us ? most certainly at the provincial and federal level. However, I am not clear how a ranked ballot system will markedly improve how the public accesses the democratic process at the municipal level.

I feel that without considerable, province-wide educational, efforts what we will have is chaos and confusion at the ballot box in 2018 if the ranked ballot is instituted.

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