

2018's Municipal Election could feature fewer election signs, if Councillor gets his way

By Brock Weir

If you were one of the residents whose eyes regularly glazed over trying to decipher hordes of election signs on just about every street corner this past fall, your eyes could rest a bit easier when it is time to next elect Aurora's Mayor and Council.

A motion from Councillor Tom Mrakas is now in the hands of staff which could put new limits on where and when potential new Councillors can put out their signs. In his motion, Councillor Mrakas called for a reduction in how long signs can be erected, imposing a limit on placing more than one sign for an individual candidate on private property, and limiting a candidate to placing just one sign on any one corner of an intersection.

While Council did not sign off on any of the proposed changes until staff were able to comment further, Councillor Mrakas said his motion was reflective of what he heard on the campaign trail, with residents speaking out on there being "way too many signs" in way too many places and for so long. His motion, he added, reflected what he believed to be best practices in other municipalities.

Although the intent of the motion found clear support around the table, Councillors had many questions that needed to be answered. One particular sticking point, as identified by Councillors Jeff Thom and Paul Pirri, was the clause limiting signs on private property, including maintaining property owners' rights to have more than one sign if they are on a corner lot and want to double the exposure for the candidates of their choice.

Councillor Wendy Gaertner, while questioning Councillor Mrakas tongue-in-cheek on whether multiple election signs stacked one on top of the other would could as a single sign, suggested limits on private property be removed altogether.

"We all went through the sign wars," added Councillor John Abel. "You would go out on the first day and place signs and it was all orderly. Three weeks later someone would go out and pop a sign right in front of someone else and there was absolutely nothing that could be done. It is incredibly frustrating because you took the time and some Johnny-come-lately just threw it down in front. If we're going to do it at all, I would rather get a little more definitive so we can fine tune it and get it done."

Mayor Geoff Dawe said he too would like to have something definitive, and the way to do this would be to get some expert opinion from municipal staff.

"One of my thoughts was should we look at bringing our sign bylaw into conformance with the Region, that way we have one set of rules and regulations we deal with," said Mayor Dawe, of the Region's more stringent rules towards location and timing.

A similar view was offered by Councillor Michael Thompson.

"Some might claim that we're amending the rules and yet we're heavily invested in them as well," he said. "I think optically it is important to get staff's feedback on the suggested amendments so they have the opportunity to corroborate to some degree that these are some of the better practices that will help alleviate the issues we saw in the last election."

"I don't want to see anybody come forward as we approach another municipal election and say the rules we created were unfair without having the opportunity to gather feedback from our Town Solicitor, the Town Clerk, and our Director of Bylaw Enforcement. It is an important step in being able to gather their feedback from an impartial perspective."

Councillor Mrakas, on the other hand, had a different view.

"With all due respect to my colleagues, I think it is our job to direct staff and I think another thing I heard along the campaign trail was the issue that Council refers everything," he said. "I think the residents are looking to us to make decisions. I am giving us the meat and I want staff to come back with a little bit of the potatoes to the bylaw."