

BROCK'S BANTER: They're coming for us!

By Brock Weir

I have never been one to lose sleep over keeping up with the Joneses. Perhaps it is a conscious decision to distance myself from my grandparents' generation who were always fascinated about what was going on on the other side of their back fence. Perhaps it was childhood trauma from next door neighbours who made it their business to patrol the comings and goings on the street as if their entire lives depended on it.

Then again, there is also the effect of growing up watching reruns of Bewitched ? laughing along with everyone else at Gladys Kravitz' hysteria at all those wacky things Mrs. Stephens and her mother were doing across the street ? which gave me an extra tutorial about what not to do.

Whatever the reason, I tend to think I am the better for it.

After last week, however, all bets are off. My binoculars are fully buffed, my popcorn is popped and I'm glued to our collective back fence to see just what those wacky characters in Newmarket are up to because? well, they are coming for us. Don't be alarmed. Just be vigilant.

I have to say I was as surprised as the next guy when I got the call Frank Klees was not seeking re-election. Whether or not you agree with him, his passion for provincial politics was clear and I naturally assumed he was in it for the long haul ? not that 20 years is anything short of that!

Nevertheless, his announcement seems to have opened up the floodgates of local conservatives looking, nay, clamoring, to fill his very roomy shoes.

Leave it to Frank Klees to unleash a political game changer when we least expected it. I don't know about the rest of you, but in just a few short hours after the announcement, the floodgates opened and suddenly our municipal election, which has, at press time, just two declared candidates keeping each other company, has no choice but to eat the Provincial Election's dust? and we don't even know when it is going to be.

Conservatives on Twitter immediately sprang into action, encouraging their political favourites to throw their respective hats into the political ring. Some had current commitments to a particular constituency. Others had recently formalized their long-held aspirations for certain political offices, but all bets seemed to be off the table as they collectively salivated at this tantalizing post ? and most of the action, so far, seems to be emanating from Newmarket.

First out of the gate was Newmarket Councillor Maddie Di Muccio, a controversial politician to be sure who has equally passionate bands of supporters and detractors within the Newmarket community and beyond. Of Councillor di Muccio, it cannot be said that she is without conviction of who she is and what she stands for. She has a voice and she is not afraid to use it.

After she came onto the provincial scene, there was rife speculation on just who would be next. Active conservative blogger, and social media impresario, Darryl Wolk, was the next person to make a serious flirtation with jumping municipal ship onto the provincial bandwagon. After promising his supporters a dramatic reveal of his decision on Monday morning, however, he ultimately decided to stick to his plan to be Newmarket's next Regional Councillor and Deputy Mayor.

In the meantime, however, coming up from behind was fellow Newmarket Councillor Jane Twinney. Describing herself as a life-long conservative, she confirmed her intentions over the weekend. She and Councillor Di Muccio are the only two female Councillors among our northern neighbours and considering their own dynamic around that table, this race will certainly be one to watch.

Other potential candidates are mulling over the prospect. Some will decide to bite the bullet and jump in, others will bow out accordingly or be weeded out by the party, but I think it is fair to say this will be one nomination race that will capture public attention, the likes of which haven't been seen since Lois Brown challenged Belinda Stronach for the local Conservative nod. Stay tuned!

GOOD NEIGHBOUR POLICY

While we're on the subject of our neighbours, for better or worse, they are like family. You can't pick ?em, but you still have to live with ?em. Recently, we have seen these neighbourhood networks (small Ns for both) spring into action, particularly during the ice storm, to provide a comforting sense of togetherness.

My neighbourhood is not unique in Aurora. I live in a townhouse, bordered on one side by commercial development, on two sides by further residential houses and on the fourth side by an eye sore of a power station. Well, somebody has to live beside it so I suppose I am taking one for the team.

The houses are well-maintained, the streetscape is nice, but like any community, we have to contend with on-street parking. I've come to the conclusion over the years that finding a car parked at my curb is a necessary evil. The same with trucks, and the occasional speed boat (don't ask). We also have a neighbour somewhere on our block that drives a school bus for a living. In the early days, it was a small bus but more recently it has had its full growth spurt and reached maturity into full-blown bus the scourge of early morning commuters everywhere. Quite often, it is parked directly outside of my house during the day and on the occasional times I am at home during the work week, it catches my eye as I look out the window, but recognize it is part of a neighbour's livelihood.

After all, it is one of the perils of living a stone's throw from Northern Lights and St. Jerome.

It was with this in mind, I listened to delegations to Council last week with some dismay. They were asking for Council support on a decision rendered by Aurora's Committee of Adjustment at the Ontario Municipal Board, denying an application by Community Living for an exemption to park a small wheelchair-equipped bus in their driveway to transport two of their wheelchair bound clients.

While it is a parking option clearly outside the bylaws, I have to question the vehemence of their opposition. Taking it to the Ontario Municipal Board is no walk in the park. According to minutes from past meetings, worries from neighbours included the general prohibition of vehicles that size, a perceived 'violation of goodwill?', general negative impacts, visual and otherwise, and one resident being unable to 'park his cube van' on his own driveway.

Unless there was a glut of people itching to move into the neighbourhood, but were unwilling to do so unless they divested themselves of their pesky small buses or cube vans, like a beloved cocker spaniel before downsizing into a pet free condo, I fail to see any inequities created by a bylaw exemption.

Residents of the home in question moved into this group home when they were able-bodied citizens, able to move around despite their challenges. Time conspired, however, to exacerbate certain issues. Now, to keep them in the home they love, this bus seems to be their only practical recourse and the vehemence to fight it seems, in turn, to challenge this very goodwill.

Curious as to the impacts of the vehicle in question, I went to the street on Sunday afternoon and was somewhat surprised to see a rather innocuous-looking white half-bus sitting comfortably within the confines of the driveway. From the arguments, I expected a flashy yellow number, but that was not the case.

The street included a number of trucks and vans overhanging their respective driveways, vans advertising construction companies and telecommunications giants, and a garish, neon-pink vehicle splattered with advertising of a further necessary service, that could be seen as a little sister to Scooby Doo's Mystery machine.

To my mind, this mini-bus should be the least of their worries.