

BROCK'S BANTER: Wielding your axis

By Brock Weir

If a tree falls in a forest and there's nobody there to Like or Share your photo, did it really happen?

So, the world at large is going to begin its seismic shift on its axis this Friday.

We've gone through the wherefores and whys. The ink has been spilled, the wounds keep getting re-opened, so I'm going to let that topic scab over for at least one week, until circumstances ? and I'm sure they will present themselves on Friday ? necessitate ripping off the Band-Aid, digging in and settling in for four years of intensive treatment.

It's going to be a long, rough ride for so many in all parts of the world, but together the world will have to persevere to get out the other side relatively unscathed.

To do so, however, it is all too important to stick together and find a collective voice so that the important issues are not lost among the white noise billowing out from quarters that are all too familiar. Efforts are being made to undercut the weight which words carry through concerted efforts to brand them ?fake news?, figments of embittered imaginations or, in short, to borrow a phrase that is being adapted and reused with alarming frequency in the lead-up to Friday, ?gaslighting.? And, unfortunately, nothing is immune to falling victim, or too sacred to be targeted.

Those feeling their oats, however, will continue to do their damndest not to hear the mounting chorus, so it is the responsibility of the majority to make sure that this is impossible; and it is also the responsibility with those still in a position of influence, albeit from the other side, to listen to effect change in the future.

It is hard to imagine anything in Aurora's political spectrum to cause anything close to a seismic shift, but next week Council is set to dip its toes into an area which could turn out to be a game changer in how local lawmakers interact with the people that elect them.

We all know the current drill.

If you have an idea on how a particular situation can be improved, you call Town Hall or show up at a Council meeting to make your pitch as a delegate, or as a member of the public at large, during open forum.

The format varies slightly if there's something to complain about in that focus often shifts to the online world of an endless stream of emails to Council members, often copied to local reporters, and electronic haranguing to anyone who will listen in whichever social media channel best suits you.

This can spur action but, more often than not, the complaints languish in the ether until one, two, or tens of individuals descend on Council chambers to lend an actual voice to their concerns, complaints, or general dissatisfaction with the status quo.

Some offer solutions, others just want a listening ear, but it is a tried and true cycle.

Take, for instance, last year's efforts by a relatively small group of local residents who repeatedly sounded the call for a series of speed cushions on four area streets. It took them a while but their campaigns, along with a few hours of Council discussion and staff reports ? and a few logistical kinks that put things back a few months ? helped them realise their goals.

Similar efforts, this time from a larger group of people, successfully led to significant restrictions to on-street parking in Aurora's historic Downtown Core which, in turn, led to a logistical nightmare for the medical building at Yonge and Kennedy as consultation with local businesses as to the impact such changes might have were woefully inadequate ? something pointed out by Mayor Geoff Dawe at the time.

So, I am looking forward with both curiosity and trepidation on the bold new experiment which could soon be implemented, pending Council approval, which would funnel complaints, concerns, and general spleen-venting over Aurora's traffic trouble to a web-based app, which would allow residents to map out problem areas, suggest solutions, and interact with staff members and residents alike on a possible course of action.

If approved, it won't be the full re-instatement of a Traffic Advisory Committee which Council pushed for last year, but the experiment could prove fruitful, ultimately expanding into areas such as public planning, infrastructure improvements, and, quite possibly by the time of the next Municipal Election, questions over governance if Council once again tries to float the balloon of whether or not Aurora should have a ward Council system or, at the very least, a smaller Council complement.

When I first read the report before Council ahead of next week's General Committee meeting recommending Town Hall proceed in this direction, I was initially skeptical.

In the grand scheme of things, unless it is an issue that directly impacts young families, Aurora's most engaged citizens are typically 40+ and 50+ and used to the status quo. Despite the obvious convenience a new system such as this might bring, Town Hall might

have its work cut out for them in selling it to the community.

However, it will undoubtedly lead to efficiencies in all corners.

It is a new way to reach out to people who, at the end of a long day at the office, simply might not have the energy to extend themselves to a public open house to learn more about a sexy topic as relevant to their neighbourhood as a new stop sign or sidewalk. It is also a much more convenient way for residents to maintain a dialogue. And, perhaps most importantly, it removes from the equation the fallback position of so many residents who try to delay the inevitable by blaming Canada Post and scads of public notices they claimed never reached their final destination.

On the other hand, there is also the possibility that Town Hall might be biting off more than it can chew.

We live in a world of instant gratification, where people value instant likes, comments, and shares on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and so forth, and where people alarmingly think what they have to offer is of less value to others if these likes, comments, shares, and retweets don't come.

Those who will be responsible for tending the field of comments bound to come in through any perspective web-based platform will have to have their fingers not only on the pulse of the community but also on the button to ensure that they get their reward ? as simple as a comment ? in near-real time to ensure residents feel their opinions are respected, valued and being heard by those who can make a difference.