

## Council hopefuls to make pitch for eighth seat July 29

**By Brock Weir**

Aspiring and potentially returning politicians will descend upon Town Hall on July 29 to make their case to Mayor and Council on why they should be chosen to fill the vacancy left by Chris Ballard.

Councillors approved the appointment process to fill the vacancy last week, bringing the day of reckoning up to July 29 from the August 12 date agreed to the previous week at the Committee level.

Their approval, however, was done through gritted teeth as many Councillors despaired over going through such an elaborate process to fill Mr. Ballard's seat when there will be less than a handful of Council meetings to attend before the current term is up at the end of November. The reality is, however, they have no choice but to do so under the Municipal Act.

According to Town Clerk Stephen Huycke, the application process hopefuls need to go through will be made available this week. After they fill out the necessary forms, candidates will be confirmed as eligible electors in Aurora, and then invited to make a three-minute pitch to Council at the end of the month.

Mayor Dawe and the remaining seven Councillors would then move through rounds of voting at the Council table until one candidate receives a simple majority. In the event of a tie with only two candidates left standing, the winner would then be chosen by lot.

Although Councillors approved the process, much of last week's discussion centred around possible alternatives to such a process and how they can vote.

Following questions from Councillor Michael Thompson, Town Solicitor Warren Mar said there is no set criteria for Council to evaluate each perspective candidate.

It is entirely up to each individual Councillor when they are making a decision to choose what they feel is the most important characteristic they are looking for, whether it be experience on Council, some other relationship to the community, [and] all of those considerations are valid, fair and entirely up to the discretion of the individual Councillor.

One thing Council can't do is stipulate that the chosen person not run in the October 27 election. Although Council can appoint someone who says they are not going to, there is no guarantee the candidate can't change their mind, Mr. Mar cautioned. And, if they did, there was nothing they could do about it.

During the discussions, some Councillors expressed a degree of discomfort in having all the prospective candidates come forward to make their case and then subjecting it to an open debate and vote around the Council table. Nevertheless, Mr. Mar said nothing would justify taking their deliberations and voting into closed session, because this is a position that would normally be filled democratically if there was enough time to do so.

We're in the middle of an election campaign and we could have every candidate who is registered, and more, come forward to speak in Council, said Councillor John Abel. It may give them an advantage. I think under the circumstances, we have five meetings left, why wouldn't we take someone we would consider to fill in for those five meetings and vote on it? I want to know if there is a faster way to move so we are not taking up too much time.

If Mayor Dawe or Councillors wanted to bring forward specific names, Mr. Mar said they would have to publically task a staff member in doing so.

The logistics of what is being proposed here just boggles the mind, said Councillor Evelyn Buck. What candidate who is

registered for the election in October wouldn't take advantage of this opportunity? They would have to be crazy not to. The idea of us sitting here and listening to each candidate, then have the opportunity to ask each of them two questions, and how we would score them? who would want to make that decision to pick the one we think scored best in their speech and the answers to the questions? We could just dispense with the municipal election altogether! I think it is insane we are required to fill the seat at this late date in a term of office.

?Councillor Abel is saying we should approach someone we believe would be able to step into the seat without missing a beat. I am in favour of that. Earlier, he said we were elected to provide leadership and I think that is leadership. We have an awkward decision to make and I think it is the simplest decision. The alternative just does not appeal to me and I don't see how anyone out there in the community could support us if we went in that direction.?

Nevertheless, Councillor Buck was the lone holdout when it came to approving the process at the end. Speaking in favour of option going forward, Mayor Dawe said he was not in favour of the appointment process the last time Council had go that route in 2008, but a by-election is no longer on the table.

?We were put in this position, so we are dealing with it as best we can,? he said. ?I was here when the last process happened and I thought it was wrong and totally inappropriate.?

Councillor Thompson also expressed his support.

?While the process might be seen as tedious and time consuming, it is a much more organized and logistical process than us sitting around a table and throwing names into the air and having a discussion in open session. It would lead to more questions about the fairness, the openness and transparency of the process. We owe it to the residents to provide them with an opportunity to participate.?