

## FRONT PORCH PERSPECTIVE: Party Politics?

Party Politics in Municipal Races?

By Stephen Somerville

Should political parties enter the Aurora municipal realm by supporting philosophically like-minded Mayoralty and Council candidates?

We are all aware that election-voting patterns at the Federal, Provincial and Municipal levels have been on the decline and that the lowest voter turnout occurs for municipal elections.

Any measure that can be utilized to both further educate and interest our fellow citizens in voting and for a better and more effective local government should be thoroughly examined.

Closer scrutiny of the issue does beg more questions: Would a candidate even want a party endorsement if proffered? If a particular riding association did vote to support municipal candidates, then what type of support would be envisioned? Would it simply be a press release stating that they are backing a specific candidate? Would it be organizational assistance to the candidates? Would it, or could it, involve the utilization of some of the ridings' financial resources in support of candidates?

Are there limits under the Canadian Elections Act as to what can be done? As well, by what internal party process is the decision made to support a specific candidate(s)?

If party politics is not introduced to the municipal election process then maybe the mayoralty candidates should run 'slates' of Councillors on a co-coordinated platform.

That is a big 'if' as we don't know if there will even be a run off as so far only one candidate, the incumbent Mayor, Geoff Dawe, has registered.

Assuming there is a mayoralty race in Aurora, where we have a nine person council (including the Mayor), then why don't mayoralty candidates this fall run as a team with a minimum of four other Council candidates, clearly identifying a coherent and focused policy platform that they will seek the public's confidence this fall?

This is especially important in our town, as there is not a 'strong' mayor system in place. Under the current setup our Mayor merely has one vote on Council.

Of course, it is important for a mayor to gain consensus and buy-in for their program, and there are obviously informal ad-hoc coalitions on certain issues, but by formalizing an alliance, the voters would know what to expect on the large issues, and, just as important, who to hold accountable if the expected program is not implemented.

Although the work and contribution of every individual Councillor is important, we look, or should look, to the Mayor for leadership and to his or her team for the development of a legislative agenda.

This is not to say that a Mayor and his/her slate of Councillors, once elected to office, would not disagree on certain issues, and appropriately enough, vote differently.

No one expects unanimity on every issue. But we should reasonably expect to see the major platform issues that the team campaigned on get implemented within a reasonable time frame.

Having individuals run as a team may increase voter turnout, as people may be more likely to come out and vote for a person who is associated with a particular side.

It may even help in the recruitment of volunteers.

It is well known that incumbents enjoy a significant advantage in name recognition. Running as part of a slate could help generate new blood on Council and may significantly reduce the individual expenses associated with seeking office as brochures and signs would only need to be done for the team.

The other nice thing about the campaign slate concept is the symbiotic relationship between the mayoralty candidate and his/her team; they really do need each other. There is a shared interest in making things work during the campaign and later on while in office.

I think Robin Sears, in an Op-ed piece in the Toronto Star last week, had it right:

'There are a dozen reasons why municipal parties can generate problems. They are often fragile collections of feuding egos, susceptible to factions, and they are not a guarantee of corruption free government, as the Charbonneau Commission has revealed. They can place partisan interest ahead of public interest.

'But to paraphrase Churchill, as he observed about democracy itself, municipal parties are the worst possible form of municipal government except all others. As Conservative MP Michael Chang has demonstrated so eloquently at the federal level? no

democracy is more accountable than one governed by a leader accountable to his peers and by them to voters.?  
Electoral platforms and campaigning does matter. The citizens of Aurora deserve a vigorous and respectful debate this upcoming fall on the issues of growth, the level, quality and costs of services, and the appropriate level of taxation.  
Clearly drawn policy battle lines could engage and galvanize voters and volunteers alike.

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