

FRONT PORCH PERSPECTIVE: Wellness Index

Municipal Term Limits and an Aurora Wellness Index

By Stephen Somerville

There are two topics that I would like to briefly address this week:

First, the question of municipal term limits.

Napoleon is alleged to have said that the battlefields are littered with the bodies of irreplaceable soldiers. He could just have easily been speaking about modern day politics.

Some renewal may be at hand this fall!

We may have upwards of twenty-five people seeking one of the eight council seats, plus we already have two declared candidates for mayor with possibly more to follow.

Since it seems that some public figures stay well past their 'best before' date, we need to help the politicians help themselves.

Mandating term limits is one way to lend assistance.

I believe that a Councillor should be limited to serving two consecutive terms.

Mayors should also be limited to two consecutive terms.

It is well known that incumbents enjoy a significant advantage in name recognition. There are lot of good men and women in our society who can serve, but the barriers to entry can be quite high, especially against incumbents who have been in office for a while. Public life is fundamentally about the nobility and selflessness of public service. It should not be about longevity; it should simply be about service.

The second item happens to do with the health of our community. While I read the local papers and I talk to my neighbours, I really have no idea if our community is 'doing well.'

I suspect it is, but it would be good to have some confirmation on this.

Roy Romanow, former premier of Saskatchewan and former commissioner on the future of Health in Canada, is the chair of a project called the Canadian Index of Wellbeing, or CIW.

The CIW seeks to 'chart and report on how our lives are getting better or worse' in areas that matter to us: health, standard of living, environmental quality, the way we use our time, education and skill levels, the vitality of our communities, participation in the democratic process, the state of our arts and culture.

Something similar to the CIW may be needed in Aurora.

What type of information or metrics should be included in such a document?

This writer suggests having performance measures in each of the following broad categories, financial, community health, individual wellness, and say, environmental sustainability.

The individual metrics under the above four categories could include things like: number of people using the Food Pantry, number of affordable rental housing units, percentage of children participating in community sports, percentage of voter turnout, percentage of high school kids not completing high school, number of people using the Leisure Complex and public skating/public swimming, percentage of people who possess a library card and capacity utilization of the VIVA buses in Aurora.

The key is that the numbers and trends should provide us with a well-balanced view of how our community is doing.

The statistics alone certainly don't tell the whole story, but they are the basis upon which to begin any meaningful dialogue and real debate about whether we are meeting the priorities of this community or even if we have the right priorities in the first place.

If, for example, all the scorecard targets are met, then our community should be in good shape.

However, in the event that all targets were met and the community did not seem any better off, this would signal that it's time to rethink the metrics being utilized.

The scorecard should be easy to read and to understand. It should have a number of charts and graphs, and not a lot of text.

The trends would also show how we compare against other similarly sized communities. It should also include comparisons against Newmarket. Although Newmarket has a much larger population than Aurora, there is a commonality, based on proximity, community make-up and shared interests.

It would be nice if the good folks at the Aurora Town Hall produced such a document. But it would be even better if our fellow citizens published this information.

This committee could be comprised of ten to fifteen citizens, including representatives from the Aurora Chamber of Commerce, various rate-payer associations, and volunteer organizations. This group would hold a couple of meetings and decide upon the

important metrics that should be included.

They could then hand over the quarterly production of this to Town Hall.

The Aurora Community Wellness Index (ACWI) could then be produced quarterly by Town Hall and published in The Auroran.

It is too bad that we did not have an initial version of an ACWI in order to help frame the debate and discussion for this fall's election.

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