

POLITICS AS USUAL: Chair Appointment Redux

By Alison Collins-Mrakas

I attended the inaugural meeting of York Region Council and witnessed the appointment of the Chair first hand.

I thought I knew what to expect, but I was wrong. I was expecting the three council member candidates (one just retired) to make a brief statement, then the vote to be called and ? abracadabra - appointment complete.

However, that is not what happened.

There were a few added twists to the ?election? that shocked me. Suffice to say that if there was any question about the relative dearth of democratic elements to that process, those questions were answered.

The first shocker was the motion put to Council as to whether they wanted to have the vote in public or by secret ballot.

Think about that: not only do we have no idea who the candidates for Chair are until we actually get to the meeting, and we have no idea how the candidates have come to be formally ?nominated?; we even have no knowledge of, or control, over how and by whom those nominated candidates end up appointed!

Council members can choose to deny us even that small sliver of the democratic process.

It is unclear to me why the voting process isn't iterated in the procedural by-law. Why isn't the method made clear before the meeting?

Why is it a question put to the floor during the meeting?

It was odd to sit there and wait for our elected representatives to decide whether they would vote publicly or secretly. Remember, they sit on that Council as our representatives ? they work for us, so we should see how they vote ? on every vote. How else would we know whether they have met our expectations?

They chose to vote publicly, by the way.

The second shocker, was the ?election? itself. The process was as follows ? each of the nominators and seconders spoke about their candidate and why their colleagues should vote for him and then the candidates pled their cases too.

Hearing from the candidates made sense.

Election speeches are necessary as they inform us about what the candidates intend to do and why they are the best choice for the job.

Hearing from the nominators and seconders made no sense.

From a procedural standpoint, I found it quite bizarre. I have concerns about the nomination process, but even greater concern about the fact that the nominators and seconders are afforded the opportunity to ? in essence ? interfere in the voting process.

Council members represent the interests of their municipality, not themselves.

Thus, they should vote independently. Having two members state how they are voting in advance of the vote and then attempt to persuade others to follow suit is inappropriate in my opinion.

It also lays bare the notion that the appointment process is an open one.

The process is highly flawed and needs to change. Full stop.

Going forward, I believe that we should take a closer look at what happens at the meetings of Regional Council. Get engaged, get involved.

Until next week, stay informed, stay involved because this is ? after all ? Our Town.