

POLITICS AS USUAL: March Break

By Alison Collins-Mrakas

This week as I was running back and forth between three committee meetings, a thought occurred to me.

It's been quite a while since I've seen a Council agenda. Why haven't we had a Council meeting? I checked the Town's website and noticed that Council has been on ?March Break? for two weeks. March Break? Now that's odd. The only folks that I am aware of who get a March Break are teachers.

I don't think anyone is suggesting that councillors are akin to teachers ? goodness me, can you imagine the curriculum if designed by some of the councillors? I foresee such useful courses as ?How to tweet while attending a meeting in 5 easy steps?, or ?How to not make a difficult decision my referring an item back to staff for another report?.

In any event, I thought that a March Break for Council seemed pretty darn out of the ordinary to use a polite term, so I decided to investigate. I was sure in the knowledge that Aurora was unique in giving this break. Full disclosure here ? I recall that when I was a Councillor I did inquire of staff at the time why we got the time off and was told, it was ?tradition?.

Though I thought the answer was ridiculous (tradition? Tradition of what? A free holiday?) given that I truly welcomed the break, I made no more of it. So perhaps a wee bit hypocritical on my part to raise it as an issue now when I benefited from it then. But I will raise it anyway.

I thought that the ?tradition? of the break was limited to Aurora ? a uniquely Auroran kind of thing. I was wrong. I checked the calendars of the local municipalities in the Region and it seems they all have a ?March Break?. It's even printed in their calendars as ?March Break?. Again, I think that's odd.

It's not even timed properly to be a kind of ?ides of March? avoidance exercise. Given the shenanigans in most municipalities, it may be prudent indeed to beware the ides of March. But that isn't the case. The break is clearly geared to mesh with the school holidays.

Okay. So the schedule allows Councillors ? and in Aurora's case part-time Councillors that often have full time day jobs ? the opportunity to be off at the same time as their children. Fair enough. But I don't know about you, but even in my office, a university, we'd have to book that time as vacation in order to go on March Break. At the university, we too have a winter break called reading week. Staff and professors do not get that time off though. It isn't our break.

So, is the Council on vacation? The staff certainly wasn't. The Town hall has been open all week ? I know because I was there dealing with staff on committee work. It does not shut down like it does over the Christmas holidays. That's because March Break is not a holiday.

So just Council meetings shut down. Again ? why?

Lest I come across as just cranky ? and truth be told maybe I am being a wee bit cranky about this ? my point is that Council has a lot of tough decisions to make and a lot of work to do in the time remaining in their term and I am very concerned that they don't have enough time to do what they need to do.

The time remaining is less than you think as it will soon be gobbled up by the silly season that is campaigning.

Yes folks, we are only 18 months away from the next election. So, to my mind, we have about 7 months or so left for this council to get some hard decisions out of the way before we have the endless months of posturing and preening at the council table by the candidates. Let me rephrase that ? before we have the endless months of even more extreme posturing at the Council table than that which we've already witnessed. I'm sure we can all agree that we've had antics all along.

So, a two week break from Council ? decision making on our behalf - is a long time. Issues fester, agenda items stall, reports can't get written. Heaven knows that they do need a break from it all ? don't get me wrong ? but they don't all need it at the same time. A March holiday merely six weeks or so since they came back from the Christmas holiday (Council did not meet, if you recall, until the third week of January) is not an efficient use of Council's time.

It doesn't allow for much time to get a whole heck of a lot of work done or decisions made, in my humble opinion. And that's all I'll say about that.

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