

POLITICS AS USUAL: The Choice

By Alison Collins-Mrakas

Since my column has to be submitted no later than noon on a Monday to make it to print by Wednesday (lest I induce a state of apoplexy in our time crunched editor!), timing does not permit me to comment on how the Council appointment process actually unfolded.

I am optimistic that the proceedings were at least somewhat dignified. Well, one can only hope.

In any event, perhaps recognizing that the previously described process was vague? Problematic? Chaotic?, the Clerk issued a change to the agenda with a proposed amendment to the voting process.

(Assuming they vote to change the process), Councillors will now be handed a voting sheet, with their own name at the top and a line upon which they will write the name of the candidate the Councillor selects for the vacancy.

The clerk will then read out each sheet submitted: "Councillor X votes for candidate X" and so on and so on until we have a tally.

If each Council member votes for a different candidate, then the list of candidates will be winnowed down from 18 to 8 after the first round. Council will do the whole thing over again, until at least five out of the eight agree on one candidate.

Scratch that. It will require a vote of at least four out of six as there will be - apparently - some absences at this meeting to address a council vacancy.

As of Friday, two members of Council (Gallo and Gaertner), sent "regrets" thus indicating that they would be unable to attend the meeting.

That is unfortunate. It's bad enough that eight people rather than 30,000 get to choose who sits at that table; to have only six out of the eight casting a vote makes it that much worse.

If an appointment has to happen, and unfortunately Provincial legislation dictates that it must, then that appointment should be made by Council as a whole, not just a part of it.

In light of that, I really do hope the two Councillors were able to make the meeting.

Getting back to my point, the proposed revised process is certainly better than the previous, unseemly free-for-all approach to the selection process, but still does not address the fundamental issue I have with how this whole thing is rolling out.

The whole process as described should not be public. It should be done in closed session. Once they've completed the winnowing and gotten to the final name, Council can then vote on that name publicly.

If there are concerns about "what goes on behind closed doors", be assured that a closed session meeting is still a meeting of Council. Members must adhere to the procedural by-law and strictures of the Act.

The voting sheets would stay part of the record of closed session. Thus there would be a record "albeit confidential" - of who voted for whom at every stage of the process.

If members do not support the final candidate chosen by the majority, they can vote against it. That's how other appointment processes work. I am unclear why this one cannot work in the same way.

You cannot convince me that this is what "openness" and "transparency" means in this context. You cannot convince me that this undignified exercise is required under the Act.

There should not be a public deliberation of the candidates. Period.

So endeth the rant.

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

To reach me, please email me at: acollinsmrakas@gmail.com. All comments, questions or concerns welcome. Contact me anytime!

(Editor's Note: Councillor Gaertner attended the meeting in question.)