

## POLITICS AS USUAL: Time

Time is of the Essence

By Alison Collins-Mrakas

I tuned into the Council meeting this past Tuesday (and thankfully it was actually aired this time. No technical glitches or nature shows instead.).

As expected, it was quite a jam-packed agenda with a number of items that were sure to cause some lengthy ?debates.?

Indeed, after over an hour of presentations and delegations and public service announcements, Council got down to Town business ? and very loooong deliberations.

In July and August, Council has only one meeting per month rather than the usual four to attend to business. Time is at a premium during these meetings so agendas should be planned accordingly.

During the summer, delegations or special presentations could be addressed in a separate meeting on a different night or perhaps at 6 p.m. before the formal meeting begins at 7.

The separate meeting would, of course, still need to be televised, but by removing delegations and presentations from the formal agendas of summer meetings, they would not interfere with the short time provided for Council's agenda.

It's an observation, not a criticism. I don't want to see special community events or awards get short shrift. I just think that summer meetings need to be better planned so as to ensure the Town's business is thoroughly and appropriately addressed in the time allotted ? not become marathon sessions (this one ended at near midnight) or worse - a rubber stamping exercise.

It was a long Council meeting, and I admit that I did not stay tuned in for very long.

In any case, I reviewed the minutes and see that Council pushed through a number of important decisions ? not the least of which is the somewhat controversial decision to increase the funding to the proposed Youth Centre.

In a 5-4 split, Council approved a \$2.6 million dollar increase in funding for the AFLC renovations and Youth Centre.

The need for the funding centred on work that was not originally in scope and to address outstanding building code compliance issues. In other words, the original plan did not account for some rather expensive upgrades that are required either by design or legislation. Fair enough. If we are not compliant, we need to do what is necessary to get up to code.

However, that is a great deal of money to be added to a project regardless of the reason ? certainly for one that has not yet gone out to tender. I reviewed the report and frankly cannot fathom how a project approved by Council in November 2012, could come back to Council mere months later with an ask of \$2.6 million more ? 1 million of which is for enhanced design elements.

To quote the report, (PR13-036), ?Renovations have been more extensive than first envisioned in order to address the program needs of the Steering Committee. The design concept, as presented, will require an additional \$1,000,000.00 in order to complete the works.? So the steering committee, which Council has tasked to advise them on what the new Youth Centre should encompass, has come back with a design that will cost an additional and unexpected extra million dollars.

Personally, I don't see enough justification in the written report to warrant providing that million dollars. I'd like to see quite a bit more of a rationale for the planned changes. I'd like to see the cost of each of the 12 items listed and then debate the relative merits of each. I'd also like to see a discussion of alternate designs ? including the creation of a completely separate structure (as opposed to renovating AFLC).

Perhaps there was a detailed presentation and I missed it? But based solely on the report as presented, there's just not enough there to warrant the provision of a million extra bucks in funding.

This report that should have been hashed out at a GC meeting first rather than tabled and ratified immediately at a Council meeting. It would have allowed for some sober second thoughts.

Regardless, while one can quibble about what the centre should be or whether the centre should be a stand-alone facility or built into an existing one, our community wants and needs a facility dedicated to youth and youth activities. This Council and staff should be commended for making a decision ? finally! ? to make it happen.

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