

## Ribfest, Concerts in the Park could be election-free zones this year

**By Brock Weir**

As the October 2014 municipal election inches closer and the weather gets warmer, it will be sooner rather than later when candidate hopefuls start knocking or calling looking for your vote.

If new measures are approved by Council this week, there will be a few places and events in Aurora which could become an election-free zone.

Council is set to approve recommendations this week which would put a halt on any campaigning by any candidates at Town-run events this year, including the summer Concerts in the Park series, as well as September's Ribfest.

The measures come as Town Solicitor Warren Mar attempts to draw a clear line in what is seen as the use of corporate resources for the election campaign.

Although Council approved the recommendations at the Committee level last week, it was far from a unanimous decision, with some arguing campaigning could draw focus away from the purposes of these Town-run events, with others celebrating campaigning as an exercise in democracy.

There is an election campaign on, said Councillor Evelyn Buck, speaking against the recommendation to bar campaigning from events like Ribfest. Everybody wants the people to be aware there is an election campaign on and whatever the candidate does to draw the public's attention to that what can be wrong with that?

Among her concerns, she said, was how prohibiting campaigning at events like these could be policed.

Mr. Mar told Council that if campaigning was permitted, it would put the Town in the awkward position of having its events co-opted by the candidates, and without clear direction from Council this enforcement would be very difficult indeed.

Nevertheless, Councillor Buck said she was not convinced campaigning would in any way be a detriment to people enjoying their ribs.

I think election campaigns are a celebration of our freedom, she said. I think wherever people are gathered, they should be free to participate in whatever rights you have as citizens of Canada and the rights we have as citizens of Canada is to campaign at elections at whatever level of government and to be a voter participant in that process. I think we are going too far in trying to control people's rights to be candidates and have active participants.

To a certain degree on that last point, Councillor Thompson said he agreed, particularly when it came to barring the use of any materials bearing the Town's logo, or even the Mayor's chain of office, in any campaign literature. This, said Mr. Mar, could open the Town up to being seen as supporting any particular candidate and should be avoided. Councillor Thompson, on the other hand, said that photos taken at various events could run the risk of falling afoul of the recommendation.

Supporting some of the restrictions on campaigning were Mayor Geoffrey Dawe and Councillors John Abel. For Mayor Dawe, recalling the 2010 campaign, there were a number of candidates at that year's Ribfest, himself among them, who took the opportunity to hand out literature until asked to stop.

Most of us were wearing a button, t-shirt or some other indication that we were running for Council, so I don't think we would be restricted in any way, said Mayor Dawe. I think it is actually a reasonable request for patrons who are there to enjoy the ribs and the music and not perhaps be subjected to [electioneering]. I don't see any issue in terms of restricting overt campaigning at Town-sponsored events.