

Buck disagrees with how Budget went down

The town's budget used to be the highlight of the year from which all things sprang.

The challenge was to wrestle the beast to the ground and keep it down for the count.

Council and staff shared the same objective: to do the best we could with the least.

I was elected to the first two year terms of office in Canada's Centennial year of 1967.

Prior to that, elections were held every twelve months, as were the budgets struck; no time for people to forget the promise and performance.

1967 was the first time the budget crossed the million dollar mark. I clearly recall late Mayor Clarence Davis' solemnity in making that declaration.

Little other business was conducted on budget night. Members were seated around a table

constructed for nine. There were no microphones. No television cameras. Members rose to their feet to address the chair.

The Mayor's role was to address the budget and outline the challenges and hoped for accomplishments. The main one being to keep the tax burden down while maintaining an acceptable level of service.

The Mayor's role of leadership was clearly defined and respected.

The occasion was celebratory. A serious responsibility completed with perhaps a battle or two well fought along the way.

Traditionally, it ended with an invitation to all present to adjourn to the room above and raise a glass. Council, staff, reporters, and whoever else was present all were welcome to join the celebration.

It was neither a secret nor a scandal.

Contrast that with approval of the 2013 budget [last week].

The agenda was top heavy. Half the month's meeting schedule had been cancelled for March Break. Items called for discussion were lengthy; the majority from the General Committee meeting minutes. I was back after several weeks of a pesky illness of which a persistent, choking cough was a feature.

I wasn't sure it was completely gone. I resolved at first to use my voice sparingly.

I was distracted and failed to note the budget item as a part of the General Committee minutes and had not been called for discussion.

The hour of adjournment was once extended. At the hour of eleven, no further motion was made. Three items left were deferred until the next Council meeting.

I assumed the budget was one. I was wrong.

It was clear from the gleeful chortles shared around the table that the joke was on me. The budget was approved without note or comment.

It was the difference between 1967 and 2013.

Between night and day.

Between trust and confidence and sly manoeuvring.

A budget in excess of fifty million dollars was slipped through with no message to the community from anyone including the Head of Council; like it was a shameful thing that wouldn't stand up to the light of scrutiny, furtively slipped through to avoid drawing public notice.

Which, from my perspective, is exactly how it should be perceived.

Councillor Evelyn Buck

Aurora