

POLITICS AS USUAL: And they're off!

By Alison Collins-Mrakas

Well folks, we officially have a horse race.

As of Friday there were 4 candidates registered for the office of Councillor with at least seven of the eight (and perhaps all eight?) incumbents expected to register within the next month or two as well.

If the past three elections are any measure of interest, the number of candidates will probably round out at around 20 by the time the door closes on the registration period.

No acclamations that's for sure ? and that's a good thing. Competition is a good thing. A diversity of opinions and visions are good for democracy. There's nothing worse than the apathy that acclamations represent. It means no one cares enough to challenge for the office. And worse still, no one cares enough to care that no one cares.

To me, that seems a real tragedy.

One of the most precious rights that we have in this country is the right to vote; the right to decide who governs on our behalf.

It is not a right to take for granted, given that literally millions of people still do not have that right. I don't mean to sound preachy, but I do think that we should never lose sight of the fact that we are indeed very blessed to have a free society ? and that that freedom came at great cost to so many.

So the multiple names on the ballot is a welcome sign. Aurora's political landscape may be many things, but apathetic is not one of them.

As it stands, the electorate will have a wide diversity of choices for the office of councillor. Unlike other municipalities, Aurora has an at-large system of representation, as opposed to a ward system. We elect eight councillors to represent the entire town instead of just one to represent our respective ward(s).

There are pluses and minuses with both methods of representation, and I will do a separate column on the pros and cons of a ward system at a later date. But speaking to what we currently have in Aurora, the at-large system presents an interesting challenge for the voting public.

Voters choose up to eight people that they would like to see sit at the council table. In essence, it rewards those 8 candidates that have the most votes. Period. There is no ranking. Just first eight past the post.

And therein lays the problem. Many voters end up voting for eight people simply because they feel they have to ? not because they think every one of them will do a good job. I have heard many, many people say things like ?I have six names, but don't know what to do about the final two?? and then they just choose two names randomly to round out their list of chosen candidates. They feel like the HAVE to vote for eight names or else they have not truly voted. That's a big mistake in my opinion.

Why? The problem with that approach, is that in doing so, in just randomly adding names to your list of candidates for whom you've voted, you are giving the same weight to these throw away candidates as you do to the six that you actually endorse. You have given all eight an equal chance at election, when you only truly support six.

It is how we end up with some curious results, shall we say, at election time.

Those elected should attain office because enough people truly supported them ? not because they won the lottery of names that simply rounded out a list.

In the end, it is your right as a voter to have a say in who represents you at the table. Make sure the names you check off are those that you think are best suited for the job, not just to complete a list. If you think there`s only four or six good candidates, then so be it. Don't force yourself to add two more names or else, don`t be surprised if your ? plus two end up at that table?

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