

POLITICS AS USUAL: Provincial Race

A Message for Provincial Candidates

By Alison Collins-Mrakas

I am already ruing my stated commitment (see my first column of the New Year) that during the municipal election period I would refrain from commenting on current Councillor's decisions, prognostications or just plain silliness as it would unfairly advantage or disadvantage them as the case may be.

Why do I rue my decision? Suffice it to say, to read the statements of Councillor Wendy Gaertner about the current Council, one has to bite one's tongue ? hard - lest one fire back with pages and pages of easy and ready evidence to the contrary.

But, that's all I'll say, or I will be accused of breaking said commitment.

Moving on, the Provincial candidate's nomination race is sure to be exciting.

There are now at least four candidates for the PC nomination, with an active search for additional legitimate contenders for the Liberal candidacy is also underway.

There's one declared candidate already, but more are sure to come shortly. As for the other two parties ? Green and NDP ? I have not heard a peep from their riding associations. Let's hope that we do soon.

Looking past the nomination race, let's look at the election itself and what the issues are at the Provincial level that have a relevant impact for our community.

There are many important issues, but for me personally, I think there are two that demand immediate attention ? transportation and planning.

Our communities are in desperate need of improved access to a variety of readily accessible transportation. As someone who takes public transportation virtually everywhere, I can tell you that what we have now is nowhere near what we need to move residents around our region efficiently, effectively and expeditiously.

Take the GO Train as an example. It is quite simply NEVER on time. The buses are generally on time, but they are milk runs that take forever to get anywhere. And the routes are insufficient, and the waits are long. If you want people to leave their cars at home, then you need to provide accessible alternatives. Short of resorting to pack mules, some days there is simply no other way to get around but a car.

The other issue? Greater municipal control over public planning.

Yes, the province, of course, should have a say in the broader strokes of public planning, but the implication of provincial planning tools are felt at the municipal level, and it is clear that little thought has been given to what these acts will look like once enacted. Why can't we say how we want our community to look and how we want our land used? Obviously we can't have complete control ? or the province would look like a crazy quilt of land uses. There must be some semblance of order to the general rules by which our communities are planned.

But, we should still have some say in how our community grows. This is not the case. How many times have we heard our planning staff say, ?well, if Developer Bob takes this to the OMB the Town will lose so we will just have to let them build whatever the heck they want?, or words to that effect?

What is the purpose of a public planning meeting then if the actions taken during said meetings will just be overturned by a provincial body?

wWe need more say in what our communities look like. We need more input into how our residents access sustainable public transportation. We need a say in how we ?Live, work and play? in Aurora.

Let's hope our soon to be new local MPP ? regardless of his or her political stripe - brings that message to Queen's Park.

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