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Voting is an important civic duty

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If there's one thing I've learned since I began covering municipal politics over a decade ago it's that local councils have the biggest impact on our daily lives out of all the levels of government. From the littlest things, like the stop sign on your street corner, to the most significant, such as where and when new houses and businesses are built and how much you pay in property taxes, your local elected officials have a hand in it all.

So if these councils are so important, why aren't people coming out in droves to vote in a municipal election? While I've heard a variety of reasons over the years, here are a few of my theories.

I believe people think it's easier to learn about a couple of provincial or national parties' platforms, versus finding out the positions of the numerous individuals running for council. Many are quick to jump on the bandwagon for the major political parties and develop a loyalty that sees them casting the same ballot election after election, regardless of the changing faces behind the party. Choosing members of council based on what those individual candidates believe in and support is a much more personal thing that some may shy away from.

In the case of Acton, or Ward 1, all of its local and regional council members were acclaimed in the 2010 election— something that can definitely decrease a community's interest in democracy and politics.

This time around there are five candidates



MELANIE HENNESSEY

running for the two Ward 1 councillor seats, but a recent all-candidates meeting in Acton only drew a modest crowd. Monday night will be the true tell of whether voter interest has returned to the ward.

We can't forget the age-old school of thought that one vote won't make a difference. But I can tell you that one vote can become paramount in a municipal election. When candidates are relying on votes from a sometimes small pool of voters in a particular ward, every single ballot counts.

There's still time to educate yourself on the local candidates and all they have to offer. Sure, doing so may take a bit of time out of your day. But your council members are the ones who will care about the details that affect your daily life. They're the ones who will go to bat when you want traffic calmed down in your neighbourhood. They're the ones who can control how often a snowplow goes by your house. And they're the ones who will decide how far you have to dig into your pockets at tax time.

If nothing else, make the effort now to learn what your potential local council members stand for. It's a far better alternative than complaining after the fact.

Melanie Hennessey is a freelance writer, photographer and copy editor. The Acton resident was previously a news and political reporter for



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