

Report card on regional councillors; overall substance needs to change

By **BRAD REAUME**
The Champion

The councillors we elect to represent us are generally busy people, but some are more effective representatives than others.

Councillors attend public meetings, tour areas under debate, ask questions, do research, direct staff and attempt to get action on local concerns after fielding complaints. Most regional councillors are part-timers and often carry a second career, some are retired and several are full-time politicians.

As we approach the final year in this council's three-year term, and more importantly as the fundamentals of municipal government are shifting underfoot, it's important to step back and assess those who represent us.

Often times when pressed, politicians say they do most of their good work behind closed doors in private sessions or they say they work behind the scenes, getting satisfaction for constituents beyond public scrutiny.

These things might well be true, however the effectiveness, creativity, and ability of public representatives can only be judged based on their work before the public. In any event, this rating is subjective — the only true rating system is the voters.

It needs to be said that Halton Region council is one of the most civil and responsible councils in the GTA. Debate almost never becomes personal, view points are respected and everyone has a voice. However, mavericks are not tolerated and the process is at times made more important than substance. This needs to change.

In alphabetical order, councillors have been graded according to time-honoured standards — grades A through F — following consultation of several sources.

LIZ BEHRENS, Oakville
A poor communicator, Ms Behrens makes comments that are usually valid but often lost due to her inability to make herself understood. Not afraid to enter a debate, she rarely says anything innovative, however she does espouse a liberal view consistently.

COLIN BEST, Milton
Chronically late, the schedule-challenged Mr. Best has bitten

C off more public committees than he can chew and has spread himself too thin. An exhaustive researcher who soft-pedals his point of view, Mr. Best consistently draws substantial voter support largely because he mingles with a lot of voters. Mr. Best is a rookie regional councillor who usually toes the line laid by more senior people.

B **KEITH BIRD, Oakville**
Mr. Bird is a smart, capable councillor who used to drive the agenda but recently has left that to others. Capable of drawing precise analogies and cutting to the quick in a debate, Mr. Bird seems to have lost some of his drive. Perhaps he is just tired of beating his head against the wall.

C **RICK BONNETTE, Halton Hills**
Quick with a joke, Mr. Bonnette is the comic relief of Halton council. Unfortunately his humour rarely illuminates debate. Known as the mayor of Acton because he represents that former small town, he is little concerned with anything beyond the borders of his fief, and contributes to debates accordingly.

B **BOB BRECHIN, Burlington**
Reasonably tough, affable and outspoken, Mr. Brechin is a leader. He may lead in odd directions, but he leads, and that is the number one quality needed in a political representative. Mr. Brechin is particularly pro-Burlington on a supposedly regional council, however he isn't the only councillor who represents his constituents first and the region second.

C **DON CARTER, Burlington**
A long serving member of council, Mr. Carter has succumbed to the disease of all long-time politicians — timidity. His experience has led to his ability to clearly see and sympathize with both sides of any debate — a non-position from which he is equally afraid to do anything. An affable man, Mr. Carter is easily the most malleable person on council. On a council that needs leaders, Mr. Carter is a follower.

C **AL COOK, Halton Hills**
Mr. Cook is new to council and slowly spreading his wings. He says what he believes and takes leadership roles, but rarely leads or fires the debate. A two-term chairman of the standing committee on health and social services, Mr. Cook could be an up-and-comer.

C **JOHN DAY, Halton Hills**
He asks a lot of questions, but doesn't seem to act on the answers. Mr. Day usually follows the lead of all Halton Hills councillors in what they are most frequently concerned with — events in the north. Also a first time regional councillor, Mr. Day showed some leadership early in the term and is still willing to put in extra hours on issues near and dear. As for the other business of council, he elects to go along for the ride.

A **JACK DENNISON, Burlington**
A successful Burlington businessman, Mr. Dennison has tried to apply some of the same hard-purposed, pragmatic philosophy of business to his work on regional council. The pit bull of budget time, Mr. Dennison often gets soft-pedaled answers, misdirected advice and even guff from fellow councillors, who are sometimes

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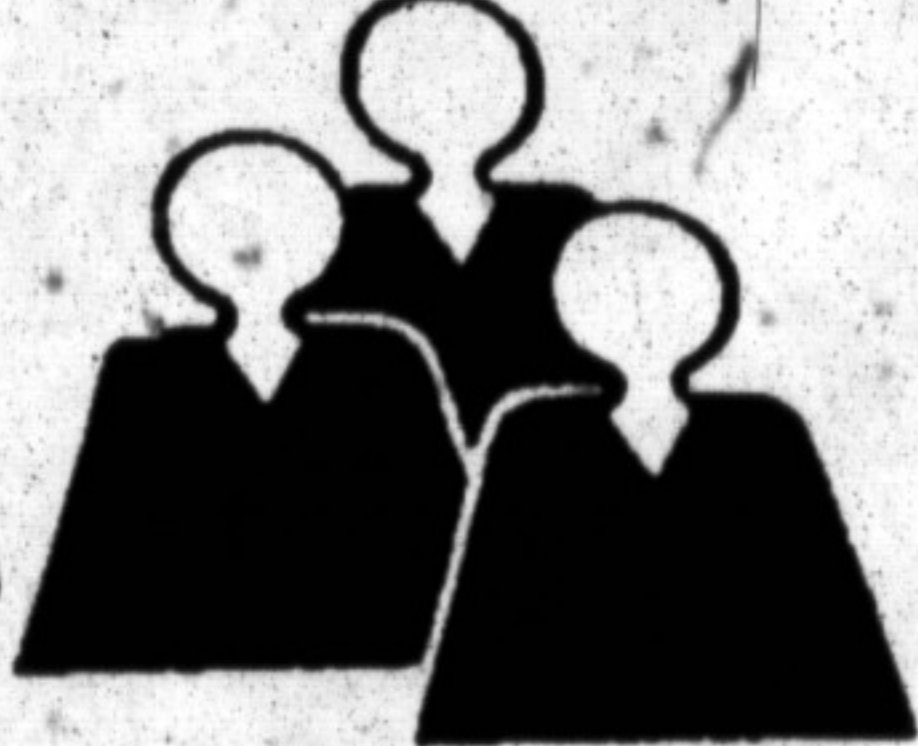
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