

Makes election tick

By KATE GILDERDALE

STOUFFVILLE—The right to vote in any election is something many people take for granted and too many fail to take advantage of, particularly in the case of municipal elections.

It's important to bear in mind, however, that every vote really does count: there have been three recounts in this municipality since 1971, and in two cases there was a difference of just two votes between winner and loser. The person in charge of municipal elections is the municipal clerk, in Whitchurch-Stouffville that office is held by Pat Oakes.

The total number of eligible voters, barring revisions to the voters' list, is 13,555, says Mrs. Oakes. To be eligible to vote, individuals must be Canadian citizens aged 18 years or older on election day, and must either be residents of the municipality or owners or tenants of land in the municipality.

The qualification period for residency is September 6th to October 17th. "People who moved in on the 18th of October, or who left on the 5th of September would not qualify," declares Mrs. Oakes.

"If you own property in a municipality, you may vote there whether you live there or not," she advises. "Some people will qualify twice in the municipality. For example, a person might live in the rural area and own a store on Main Street. However, that person may vote only once, and in this case that vote must be taken in the wardpoll in which he resides."

Nomination day, the final date for candidates to file nomination papers, was Monday October 17. A candidate needs at least ten nominees to run, and those must be eligible electors in the candidate's ward.

Strict limits are set on candidates' campaign expenses: the mayor may incur \$5,500 plus 50 cents per elector, councillors and school trustees are allowed \$3,500 plus 50 cents per elector. Trustees can claim the 50 cents for their own school board supporters only. The clerk provides each registered candidate with a final total of allowable expenses ten days after nomination day.

"The town budget for the 1988 election is \$34,000, or \$1.89 per capita," Mrs. Oakes states. "This is not a high price to pay for the rights of our citizens to choose the individuals who will pass the laws of our local government, which will affect the taxpayers of Whitchurch-Stouffville for years to come."

The task of preparing for an election is an awesome one, and initial preparations in Mrs. Oakes' office started last fall.

Each ward, or electoral district, must be split into polling subdivisions consisting of up to 350 electors. The total number of polling subdivisions for the 1988 election in Whitchurch-Stouffville is 45.

An accurate and complete list of voters is essential. "The enumeration to produce the voters' list is conducted by the Provincial Government," explains Mrs. Oakes, adding that the completed list is given to the clerk, whose official title during the election is returning officer.

The list includes the names, addresses and sex of eligible voters and indicates whether or not they are residents of the area. To identify school support, three different ballot papers have to be printed once numbers are finalized: public school, separate school and French language.

The clerk has to check the list and post copies in her office and other areas of the municipality. "My practice has been to post a copy of the list in each polling subdivision and in each ward," notes Mrs. Oakes. "This is to allow people to examine it to see if their names have been properly included."

If errors are discovered or names have been excluded from the voters' list, individuals can apply to the clerk to make correction during the revision period, which for this election ended on Saturday, October 15. "The revised list is known as the polling list of electors eligible to vote in the municipal election," Mrs. Oakes states.

Qualified electors whose names are missed can have them added at the poll, but if the list contains incorrect information, it can't be revised after the end of the revision period.

The clerk is responsible for mailing a notice to each elector, stating the time and place of both the advance and regular polls. It is also the duty of the clerk to establish polling places where people go to cast their votes, and this year approximately twenty such places will be required.

"The clerk has no power of expropriation to order people to allow their buildings to be used as polling places on election day," says Mrs. Oakes. "After I find appropriate property, I have to try and persuade the owner to allow us to use it for such a purpose."

A variety of criteria have to be considered in choosing suitable sites, she observes. "In trying to find these places, I am looking for large rooms that can accommodate the people coming there. There has to be good road access and adequate parking, since most people will be arriving by car."

It's important to have the

voting area on the ground floor, particularly when considering elderly or disabled voters, who would have difficulty negotiating long flights of stairs. Location is another important factor. "Although a building may be able to accommodate a large number of people, its location may not be convenient," stresses Mrs. Oakes.

Another of her duties is to locate and train suitable people to run the polls on election day. "The person in charge of a poll is called a Deputy Returning Officer (D.R.O.)," she says. "To assist the D.R.O. a poll clerk is appointed." Mrs. Oakes contacts people who have worked in previous elections and she asks them to recommend friends as well. The positions are also advertised.

"We're looking for 50% more for this election," she notes. Each of the 45 polls requires one D.R.O. and one poll clerk, and Mrs. Oakes also has four or five people on standby in case someone has to drop out at the last minute.

The D.R.O.s receive \$100 and the poll clerks are paid \$75, which covers their duties on election day as well as attendance at a training presentation, and some preparatory reading. Anyone who is interested should contact Mrs. Oakes at 640-1900.

Voters who are unable to attend the regular polls can vote at one of two advance polls on Saturday November 5th and Thursday November 10th. Locations are Wards 1-3, Ballantrae Community Centre and Wards 4-6, Parkview Village. The official election date is November 14th. Hours for both advance and regular polls are between 10 a.m. and 8 p.m.

There used to be rules governing what constituted a valid vote on the ballot itself. Now, says Mrs. Oakes, any clear indication will do, whether it's a tick, X or other mark. If there's any doubt, "it's up to the D.R.O. to make the final decision on whether it's valid."

After the doors close at 8:00 p.m. on election day, the D.R.O. opens the ballot box and counts the ballots. "Once the final tally is known the D.R.O. or poll clerk is required to telephone the results to my office," explains Mrs. Oakes. "They then deliver the ballot box and the official signed tally to my office."

The telephoned figures are checked against the official statement brought into the office and the final results are announced by the clerk. The figures are double checked the following day, and a formal announcement is made by the clerk on the Thursday following the election. The clerk then posts the results at the municipal office.



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