



STAFF PHOTO/SJOERD WITTEVEEN

Signs necessary election evil

BY LISA QUEEN
Staff Writer

Randy Bolt is so frustrated about the damage done to his car by a flying election sign in Vaughan, he has decided not to vote in the Nov. 10 municipal election.

"I'm at the point I'm definitely not going to vote," said the Toronto resident, who complains his appeals to several politicians to help him address the problem have fallen on deaf ears.

"If they're not going to help me now when they're kissing up for my vote, will they help me after (the election)?"

Welcome to the world of election sign wars, where political candidates trying to capture the attention of voters are at odds with residents upset with the vandalism, eye pollution and safety hazards the advertisements create.

Making matters worse this fall is the fact the municipal election comes on the heels of a provincial vote, meaning signs of one political stripe or another will have been up from Sept. 2 to Nov. 10.

East Gwillimbury Mayor James Young is the only mayor in York Region who doesn't need to post signs because he has been acclaimed.

He argued signs are a necessary evil for politicians. They are needed to attract voters' atten-

tion, but the big-budget advertisements are also a target for vandals.

Mr. Young believes signs have more impact if they are posted on residents' lawns, where they are a clear indication of voter support, than if they are cluttering up roadways and intersections.

"I never found much point in putting them on every road side and public property I could find," he said.

"If people see them too much, it can be a bit of overkill. I think they can get a little too much. My biggest concern is safety."

Mr. Bolt believes if candidates are going to post signs along roads, they must be willing to accept responsibility for any problems they create.

His bumper was slightly damaged while he was driving home Oct. 15 from his job in Aurora.

As he was travelling south on Dufferin Street north of Steeles Avenue, he said heavy winds sent a Mario Ferri election sign flying into traffic.

The sign deflected off two cars and then hit mine. It hit the bumper and landed on my windshield before blowing away," said Mr. Bolt, who said the sign left red and black paint on his bumper.

Mr. Bolt's repeated attempts to contact Mr. Ferri, a ward



councillor who is running for regional councillor this time out, have gone unanswered. Other politicians he has approached have ignored his appeals.

"I want (Mr. Ferri) to repair the damage. Just touch up the paint and I'll buff it up."

'CRAZY TIME'

Mr. Ferri said he has received Mr. Bolt's e-mails and intends to meet with him to discuss the incident when he gets a moment.

"It's just been a crazy time," he said.

"If it can be established if it was my sign, I want to be satisfied that is the case, of course I will pay."

Meanwhile, Mr. Ferri sympathizes with residents' concerns about election signs.

He supports introducing a new policy that candidates would agree to limit the size and

placement of their signs.

"It's an environmental hazard and an economic one too," said Mr. Ferri, who estimates about 600 of his signs have been destroyed.

However, he stops short of calling for a ban on election signs.

"You can't get rid of them altogether," he said.

"Incumbents have the advantage in having their name recognized. For those new people, trying to break into it, (a ban) would be an infringement in their rights. I don't think it would be Constitutional, but I think we can restrict them and control them."

Thornhill resident Peter MacLeod is infuriated by candidates' blatant disregard for sign bylaws.

"When you think about it, politicians are the biggest sign polluters on the face of the earth. I'm not going to vote because of the signs," he said.

"It's not a case of freedom of speech. It's a case of litter, non-recyclable litter. My concern is the very people who pass the bylaws (regulating the use of signs) are breaking them."

Mr. MacLeod's concerns are echoed by Vaughan Watch.

The citizens' group has posted examples of politicians flouting sign bylaws on its website.

Georgina Mayor Jeff Holec found out this month how nasty

the election sign war can be.

He was left badly shaken after discovering vandals spray-painted obscenities on signs on his front lawn.

York Regional Police are investigating the incident.

"It's not a nice thing to know there are people out there who are that willing to threaten your security over an election issue," Mr. Holec said.

"It definitely leaves you with a feeling of threatened security."

Like political hopefuls in any community, Godwin Chan has had his fair of election signs damaged by vandals.

But the council candidate for Ward 6 of Richmond Hill was taken aback when he saw a possible racial slur defacing one of his signs this month.

Although Mr. Chan stressed he doesn't want to blow the incident out of proportion, he believes the vandalism could be read as a degrading remark against his Chinese background.

"It's a derogatory word for my ancestry," said Mr. Chan, who found the offending sign Oct. 20 southwest of 16th and Bayview avenues.

"When I saw that, I thought it was way out of line. It's disturbing. If someone calls me a jerk or doesn't like my campaign, that's one thing. That's democracy. But to make a derogatory comment about my ancestry is another thing."

Melon-head

"Best Place for a Child's Haircut"

City/Parent Magazine

Globe and Mail

North Toronto Post

MELONHEAD HAIR CARE PRODUCTS FOR KIDS!

10% off

Your first visit with this ad!

Markville Shopping Centre • 905.944.9098

3215 Yonge Street • 416.483.7010
Promenade Mall • 905.731.6200

Pop in or Call us for an appointment!