

OPINION

Stouffville Sun-Tribune
 A Metroland community newspaper
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Editorial

Onus on voters to ask questions

The province opened up a can of worms last week when it announced municipal politicians may stay in office for four years after this November's election, instead of three.

The three-year term isn't long enough for municipal politicians and school board trustees to enact effective strategies and it gives more respect to local level politicians, Premier Dalton McGuinty said.

The idea is causing quite a ruckus among politicians, who are debating how long it takes to get work done once elected.

A four-year term, some critics also say, gives incumbents more exposure than ever, which can deter new faces coming to the table.

While it's important to ensure citizens have an opportunity to express their opinions at the ballot box and even run for office, it's most important to ensure quality people are leading our communities.

With a longer term of government, it puts even more onus on municipal voters to elect intelligent, action-oriented, dedicated leaders with values, ethics and vision.

Voter turnout at the municipal level is traditionally low; constituents are uninspired by municipal politics, even though decisions made at this level greatly affect our lifestyle.

Voters now, more than ever, need to ask candidates hard questions about their stand on important municipal issues such as growth, taxes, traffic congestion and waste.

We can't take for granted that just because someone's name appears more often than others in newspapers or charity group volunteer lists, they are better qualified to make key decisions about the future of our communities.

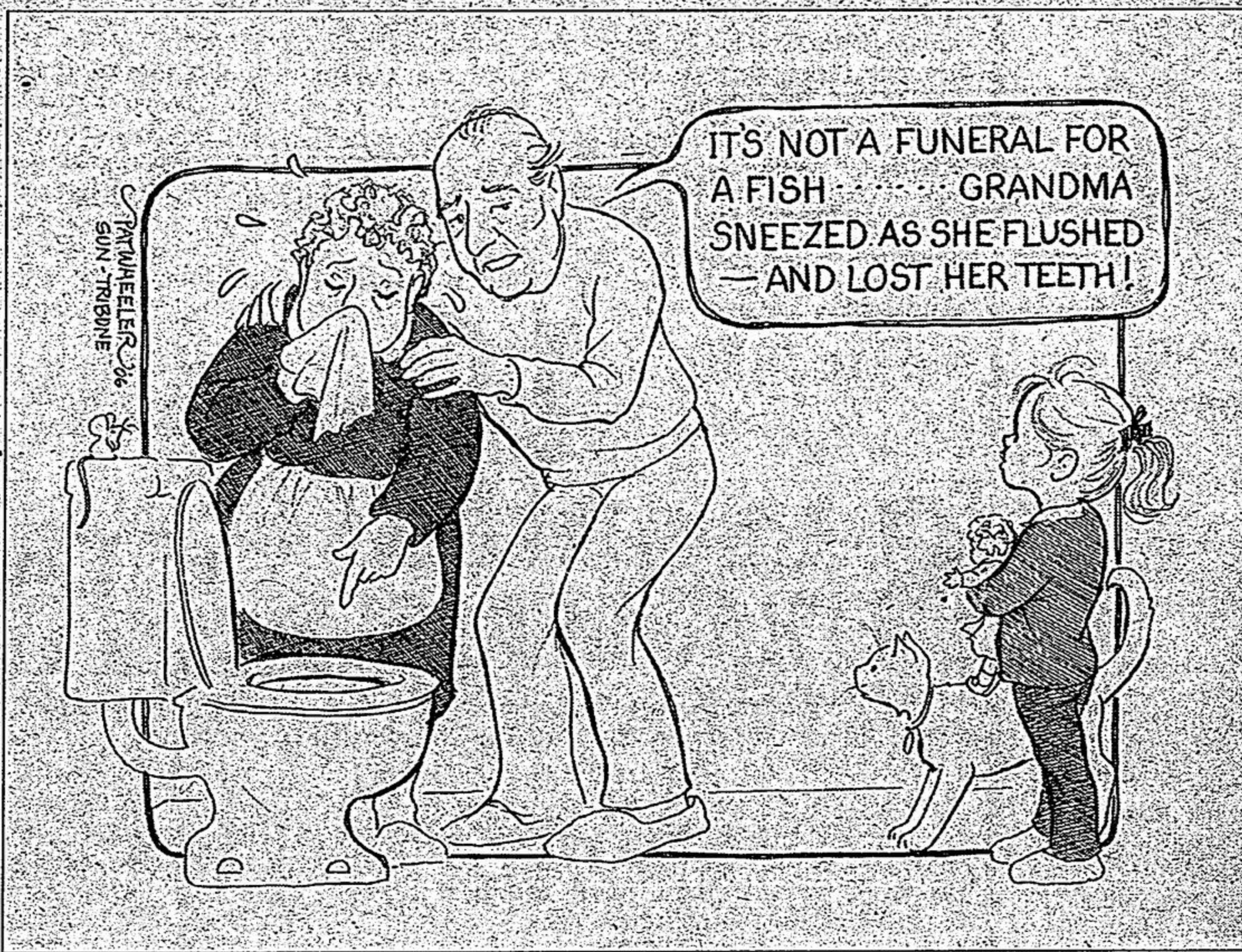
Let's face it, the first year of an elected term is largely orientation, getting feet wet, learning the ins and outs and legalities of municipal government.

The second year, a politician gets down to business. A cynic might say the final year is all about campaigning for re-election.

On the positive side, a four-year term gives councillors another productive year of strategy and planning.

Even seasoned incumbents have to wait for newcomers to catch up on issues before they getting down to business.

If the four-year term is going to be our new reality, voters had better pay close attention to what candidates are saying these next eight or nine months.



Debora Kelly

Mexico not worthy of our tourism dollars

I can't begin to imagine the sorrow and shock felt by the family of Dominic and Nancy Ianiero.

Not only are they grieving the senseless and brutal murder of the Woodbridge couple on the eve of their daughter's wedding at a Mayan Riviera resort last week, but it appears the opportunity for justice they so rightly seek diminishes with each day that passes.

They have been at the mercy of a ludicrously and deliberately incompetent Mexican justice system that appears more concerned about protecting the country's tourism market than apprehending the perpetrators of this horrendous crime.

Are we really to believe a team of professional hit women — well, maybe it was women — from Canada roused the Ianieros from their bed in the early morning, slit their throats and, leaving a trail of blood behind them, then collected their bags from their nearby rooms before heading to the airport to catch their charter flight home later that afternoon?

It's a preposterous story.

Yet this is what Mexican authorities announced shortly after the murder was discovered, without presenting a shred of evidence. Clearly, because the Ianieros are of Italian descent, the officials thought they could get away with suggesting organized crime was involved. It was only one further indignity to this hard-working, family-focused couple whose lives had been so abruptly ended.

While Mexican investigators repeatedly changed their story since then, they continue to point fingers at Canadian suspects, without appearing to involve Canadian police.

Which meant the Ianiero family, rather than being able to grieve their devastating loss in privacy, was forced not only to stand in the glare of a relentless media speculation, but to make a public plea for the justice Canadians usually take for granted.

This case becomes even more disturbing on learning Canadian authorities have been involved.

It's a travesty to suggest information about RCMP involvement can't be made public due to the "ongoing investigation." Our justice officials have to come clean, most certainly to the Ianiero family.

In the meantime, we should keep in mind Mexico is a country plagued by rampant crime and violence and its justice system is corrupt and incompetent.

York Region residents and officials should not only loudly join in the cry for justice for the Ianieros, but should also turn their backs on a country not worthy of a single cent of our tourism dollars.

Letters to the Editor

Markham's development history could be Stouffville's future

Re: *Region running out of land*, Feb. 23.

On Dec. 26, 1985, I wrote a letter to your newspaper concerning future development of Markham farmland. Markham then had a vast supply of prime farmland within its boundaries and a pro-development MPP, Don Cousens, stated, "You can't always use the excuse of preserving prime agricultural land" as justification for not building homes and factories.

Fast forward to 2006 and a booming Whitchurch-Stouffville is poised, arguably, in very much the same situation as Markham was 20 years ago. Town planners are eyeing farmland as the future site for thousands more homes.

Beef farmer Ralph Smalley states that since small family farms are disappearing anyway, as long as prime fertile farmland isn't the first to go, development isn't too detrimental. It sounds like win-win all around. After all, farmland is plentiful, frustrated farmers are happy to sell their unprofitable farms and besides, food is cheap at the grocery store.

German philosopher Georg Hegel once stated, "We learn from history that we never learn anything from history."

Here are our "long-range" planners using the same reasons to justify urban sprawl as they did 20 years ago. Haven't we learned anything? Surely the lessons taught by Markham with its rampant sprawl, cookie-cutter subdivisions and horrendous traffic problems offer compelling reasons for Whitchurch-Stouffville and the rest of York Region to come up with smarter land use plans. I say

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"town planner" should enter the oxymoron dictionary, right beside "military intelligence"

I have been a small family farmer in Markham and Whitchurch-Stouffville for the past 30 years. Farming is tough, but we are far from gone. We have had to change our focus from commodity agriculture to niche marketing to stay profitable.

Think that prime fertile farmland will be saved? Think again. Without belabouring the already well-documented loss of urban edge agriculture, I'll give you an example. As late as 1959, the No. 1 farm county in the United States (by dollar volume) was Los Angeles County. Today it's the nation's most populous.

Don't get too cosy with greenbelt legislation as farmland protection in perpetuity either. The jewel in the greenbelt crown of 1985 Markham was the parkway corridor south of Hwy 7. Today, it's the 407 toll road. Political altruism often has a shelf life.

Remember, that sign says "Country Close to the City." Let's not roof over the very same countryside that brought people here in the first place.

GUY FARINTOSH
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