

Figuring out who to call can be confusing

BY SEAN PEARCE
spearse@yrmg.com

When there's something wrong in your neighbourhood, who you gonna call?

With four different levels of government serving York Region residents, it is not always a simple task to determine who is responsible for a particular problem.

After all, if there is a pothole at the end of your driveway, do you call your councillor to complain or the region?

If your bus is routinely late, does your MPP deserve an earful?

If you are a little mystified by the workings of the municipal, provincial and/or federal levels of government don't worry, you are not alone, York University political science professor Bob Drummond said.

Most people don't differentiate that easily between the different levels of government, he said.

"They just assume someone is taking care of the various issues."

Even so, Mr. Drummond said citizens are not entirely at fault for being a little iffy on how government functions. In the game of "who does what", things can quickly become confusing.

The role of the different levels of government is not explained all that well, Mr. Drummond said, and it can also get quite complicated.

Often, levels of government will co-operate on an issue or share responsibility for a service and that only ends up further muddying the waters for people, he said.

Compounding the problem is the fact most people simply don't pay attention to government, Mr. Drummond said.

That is, of course, until it impacts them in some adverse way.

As long as things run smoothly, government goes more or less unnoticed by the public, he continued, but stop collecting garbage or raise taxes too sharply and people will get fired up in a



STAFF PHOTO/MIKE BARRETT

Frank Henriques is senior team lead, hub 3, with York Region operations, maintenance and monitoring. Last year, his department performed nearly 40,000 tests on your water supply.

► To read the whole story, go to yorkregion.com

big way.

An informal York Region Media Group poll in the north end of the region found virtually everyone knew who their mayor was, but just two of the 30 people queried knew the name of their ward councillor.

One respondent could name all councillors by first name, while the other knew the full name of just a single councillor.

"That's not really surprising," Mr. Drummond said. "It's often the case that people don't know who their provincial premier is."

The dismal voter turnouts at the municipal level and declining rates of participation at provincial

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and federal levels seems to indicate people go back to being apathetic and complacent reasonably quickly once their initial outrage fades, Mr. Drummond said.

"Now, how do you fix it? I'm not sure," he said. "If I knew how to do it, I'd be out there doing it."

Mr. Drummond believes it will take the emergence of some

galvanizing issue and/or the presence of a very charismatic leader before people really tune into politics.

For those seeking to learn more about how government functions before one or both of those things happen, here is a brief primer on how government in our area operates.

First, there are 444 municipalities in Ontario and, as creations of the province rather than the constitution, all governed by the Municipal Act.

Every municipality must also adhere to other pertinent pieces of provincial and federal laws, such as the Planning Act.

Municipalities have certain powers under the Municipal Act and can pass bylaws, establish budgets and set the local tax rates.

Municipal governments are generally overseen by an elected council made up of councillors,

CONTACTS

Municipal phone numbers and websites

► Aurora: 905-727-3123 or visit aurora.ca

► East Gwillimbury: 905-478-4282 or visit eastgwillimbury.ca

► Georgina: 905-476-4301 or visit georgina.ca

► King: 905-833-5321 or visit king.ca

► Markham: 905-477-5530 or visit markham.ca

► Newmarket: 905-895-5193 or visit newmarket.ca

► Richmond Hill: 905-771-8800 or visit richmondhill.ca

► Vaughan: 905-832-2281 or visit vaughan.ca

► Whitchurch-Stouffville: 905-640-1900 or visit townofws.com

elected either by wards or at-large, and led by a mayor, reeve or chairperson.

Our region consists of one upper-tier level of government, the Regional Municipality of York, and nine lower-tier municipalities — Aurora, East Gwillimbury, Georgina, King, Markham, Newmarket, Richmond Hill, Vaughan and Whitchurch-Stouffville.

In 2013, the budget for York Region was \$2.9 billion, including capital and operating expenses, whereas the budgets for lower-tier municipalities range from \$32.7 million in East Gwillimbury, to \$373.7 million in Markham.

Lower-tier municipalities have a myriad of responsibilities and look after the fire service, bylaw enforcement, local roads, parks and recreation, curb-side garbage collection and also serve as tax collectors for the upper-tier municipality and school boards.



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