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## The Big 5-0

Let's get you interested in voting



Whitchurch-Stouffville council will consider methods next month to increase voter turnout in 2014. Outgoing Mayor Wayne Emmerson, who is no fan of electronic voting, expects up to 50 people to run for council next year, including about six hoping to be elected mayor.

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# Didn't vote? Then don't complain: councillor

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Did your garbage get picked up when it was supposed to?

Were your sidewalks cleared in a timely fashion following a snowfall? How about your street?

Do you curse every time you drive over a pothole in town?

How about those soccer pitches — were they ready for use on game day?

By the way, did you vote in the last municipal election?

Chances are you are among the approximately 60 per cent of eligible residents who did not in 2010.

"If you don't vote, you don't have a right to bitch," said Councillor Rob Hargrave.

Municipal elections aren't sexy and fodder for the gossip pages, but your neighbour, who may also happen to be the mayor or a councillor, can hike your property taxes and curb your garbage collection with a simple yay or nay.

"It's probably one of the most important votes and elections," Mr. Hargrave said.

The veteran local politician is not alone in his thinking.

"I think my vote counts and every vote counts," said 19-year-old Melissa Noble, who is excited to cast a ballot for the first time next year.

"It's important. It affects what

## HAVE YOUR SAY, STOUFFVILLE

► What do you think of these issues or any others?  
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happens in the community where I live," said 65-year-old Carole Croteau.

So why don't more people think the way these residents do?

Apathy. Too busy. They don't understand the issues and their impact, they don't have an opinion regarding politics or it's their right not to vote are some of the guesses people gave the Sun-Tribune when asked.

Everyone we stopped in our informal street poll said they voted.

"The only thing that brings people out is a heated race for the mayoral position," said Michele Kennedy, the town's clerk.

She's presided over nine municipal elections.

A battle for the top seat could very well happen in 2014, as Wayne Emmerson won't be vying for the position he has held on and off for 17 years.

He wants to become the regional

chairperson.

He lost in only one mayoral election and he missed another term due to health issues.

Mr. Emmerson expects between 40 and 50 people to run for council, with a half dozen hoping to fill his chair.

"I'm asking them to put their name on the ballot," he said.

The only unofficially declared candidate for mayor is Peter Carle. Joanne Iannuzzi will once again try to become the Ward 6 councillor.

Fourteen years ago, East Timor held a referendum. It took residents two days of walking just to register to vote, then two days back to cast their ballot. Voter turnout was 98 per cent, said Stouffville's Michael Kennedy, an international elections administrator, in an interview last year.

He is also the husband of Whitchurch-Stouffville's clerk.

"It just looks so bad on us," Mrs. Kennedy said of low voter turnout.

Those who make decisions on tax and water rates, along with snow removal, recreation fees and facilities, among other things, do so based on what they hear from residents.

However, when less than half of eligible voters cast a ballot, there is no true representation, according to Mr. Hargrave.

Is too difficult to vote?

The municipality currently offers voters the opportunity to cast their ballot by mail, over the phone and in-person — before the election and on election day.

In 2010, the advanced polls brought out 5.34 per cent of eligible voters. The remaining 38.87 per cent cast their ballot on election day. There were 87 polls scattered throughout the urban and rural portions of the municipality.

A report is expected to come before council Aug. 13 with other options councillors could consider to help increase voter turnout.

"You can make it as easy for them to vote, but if they don't feel like it, they won't vote," Mrs. Kennedy admitted.

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One method Mr. Emmerson is opposed to is electronic.

He called it "flawed" but admitted "it will come. I can't stop it."

Mr. Emmerson said people should take that half-hour out

of their day to check their boxes because "it's a democratic right and we're very fortunate to do that."

He has personally utilized the mail-in ballot for Kawartha Lakes' elections. He has a cottage there and owning property within a municipality enables that person to vote, even if they do not reside there permanently.

One option that won't be in the report is mandatory voting, which is utilized by Australia.

"If somebody tells me I have to, I might rebel," said Constance Quin, 85, who votes because "I feel that you should vote."

Whitchurch-Stouffville's rapid growth has created another problem.

Some newcomers know little when it comes to the issues and who the candidates are because they literally just moved here.

Mrs. Kennedy noted in the 2010 election, polls in the newest areas had very low voter turnout because these residents barely knew how to get to their new homes, never mind the polling station.

In the 2010 election, there were 24,092 eligible voters. Just over 10,000 people, or 43.96 per cent cast a ballot.

As of July 10, there were 30,015 eligible voters, according to Mrs. Kennedy.