

OPINION



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SATURDAY FORUM

Do your homework, attend council meetings before voting

You haven't voted in a recent municipal election. Why not? Voting is your privilege, it's a powerful force and can make a positive difference in your society. But way too few of us are doing it.

In the last municipal election, in 2010, only 45 per cent of us in Whitchurch-Stouffville bothered to vote.

Internationally, Canada ranks an abysmal 14th out of 17 countries studied when it comes to voter participation.

Among young Canadian voters, ages 18 to 25, less than 39 per cent voted in the last federal election. In Britain, 44 per cent of them turned up at their polling station. In Germany that number is a whopping 59 per cent, but seen there as distressingly low.

Your chance to up voter participation starts with the next municipal election in October 2014.

This level of government has the most immediate impact on your daily life. Think fire services, garbage and recycling pickup, leisure services and more.

But how do you ensure your vote has the most clout?

Do a little research. Talk to the candidates who come to your front door. Read their brochures. Look them up on the Internet to see what their accomplishments are and whether their vision of the municipality is close to yours.

Attend candidates meetings. Ask questions. Read The Sun-Tribune.

Check Twitter, Facebook and other social media where some politicians are already successfully tapping into the younger vote.

But if election day is too far away and you just can't wait to see your politicians in action, attend a council meeting in the "new" town hall, 111 Sandiford Dr. Meeting dates and information are always posted in the local press and on the town's website.

Many times during the past 15 years or so, you could roll a bowling ball through the council chambers and hit only a handful of regulars, a council watchdog or



Hannelore Volpe

two — and a reporter.

Other times, there is standing room only, way out the door into the hallway. It's a sure bet when something is planned that is too tall, too loud, too close or in the wrong spot, people come to council. In droves. Sometimes with matching T-shirts and signs or petitions stacked several feet high. These meetings are usually much louder.

When a group of young people wanted a better skatepark, they came to council to present their case. (They got it.) People came to talk about developers cutting down too many trees or bungalows that were too tall.

More recently, seniors came asking for a 55+ centre (not there yet) and others came asking for lights so they could cross from Parkview Village to Nofrills (done).

Decisions about new facilities — think library, swimming pool, museum, splash pads, 19 on the Park, ice pads and more — are made at council meetings.

People aren't always happy with local politicians' decisions. But the vast majority of meetings were conducted in a civilized, if occasionally loud, manner. In general, people have learned that you don't have to throw stuff to get your point across.

Since many of us will be reaching out to our councillor for help with a problem or to have our say at council, why not become part of the process now?

Keep an eye out and do your homework.

And don't forget to vote.

Whitchurch-Stouffville resident Hannelore Volpe covered town council for 10 years for The Sun-Tribune.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

No reason to keep gates in park

During the last two weekends, I found "our" Memorial Park closed for vehicle traffic.

The first weekend, there was "minor" damage to one of the gates after a car drove right through. I talked to a police officer, who mentioned lack of warning signs and gates are unattended. The gates were fixed and closed last weekend again.

I noticed more damage at one of the gates.

Visiting the area on both weekends, I could find no reason for the closure.

I think it was a waste of taxpayers money, again.

All that has changed is the diversion of the Friday afternoon and Saturday traffic.

When Main Street is congested, many drivers take the backroads (ie. Blake and Market streets) to get home.

Instead of taking the Park Drive, they are now diverted to the parking lot of our library/swimming pool, meaning the parking lot is now a thruway.

HAVE YOUR SAY, STOUFFVILLE

► What do you think of these issues or any others? E-mail
jmason@yrmg.com

I saw a large amount of cars Friday around 6:30 p.m., including a line-up of more than 10 cars.

This is very dangerous as at least 50 youngsters are leaving the library/pool all at once.

They are running toward their waiting parents' car and hardly looking out for moving cars.

*On Friday afternoon
and evening and
all day Saturday, I
found nobody in the
park.*

Very many parents were quite upset about this and their concern is justified.

What was once a parking lot became an instant highway for the entire length of

the lot.

Stop signs are respected, but after stopping, all cars were speeding.

I also noticed this on Saturday morning. It was nearly the same, but in afternoon the traffic was light.

On Friday afternoon and evening and all day Saturday, I found nobody in the park.

I took some pictures to prove this and delivered them to my councillor, Rob Hargrave.

Leaves me with one question: Why do we now have gates to our park?

Burkholder Street is already properly marked with stop signs and a tow zone.

All we needed are two signs at \$20 each on either side to post reduced speeds.

Pretty sure if an emergency arose in our park, a fire truck or ambulance is looking for a detour, if gates are closed.

Please remove the gates. They are not an enchantment to our park.

It's our treasure, our mayor said. Now we have an eyesore added.

JACK VERHOOG
STOUFFVILLE

NO... I'M NOT GOING TO VISIT HER
IN HOSPITAL...
HOSPITALS ARE
NOT HEALTHY
PLACES!

