

## Differing views on ranked ballots in elections

By Bill Rea

The Province is planning to give municipalities the option of using ranked ballots in future elections, starting with the one scheduled for 2018.

But it looks like more details and study will be needed before the idea is embraced locally. Dufferin-Caledon MPP Sylvia Jones called for a referendum on the matter.

The concept of ranked ballots is known by a couple of other names, such as weighted ballots or preferential ballots. It allows voters to rank the candidates on the ballot according to preference (first choice, second choice, third choice, etc.) the ballots for the candidate coming in last would be examined for who the second choice was, and those votes would be distributed to those candidates. The process would continue until one candidate had a clear majority.

In making the announcement last week, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing cited certain advantages. They include reducing the likelihood of strategic voting, which occurs when people opt not to vote for their first choice because they figure that person hasn't got a chance. It's also thought it would reduce negative campaigning, and discourage candidates from dropping out before election day in an effort to avoid vote splitting.

‘‘Consultation needs to occur,’’ Jones commented, adding it should come through a referendum. ‘‘That is a serious switch.’’

One of the problems with the concept, Jones said, is it favours incumbents.

She was also concerned that it could be tried once in a municipality, and then officials there decided to switch back to the old system. Jones said that could create a lot of confusion.

Mayor Allan Thompson said he would want more information.

‘‘I'd like to do some research on it,’’ he said.

Thompson said the matter has been discussed at meetings of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, and the consensus is it would be more of a benefit to large municipalities.

Thompson also said he didn't think ranked ballots will get more people out to vote, adding there's a need to get people better engaged in what local government does.

‘‘We need to do a better job of educating the public,’’ he said.

‘‘That's a different way of doing things,’’ Councillor Gord McClure commented, adding a lot of people might have trouble picking more than one candidate.

Councillor Barb Shaughnessy agreed the incumbents would still have an advantage in this case, owing to name recognition. She added there's still a need to have an educated and informed electorate to increase voter turnout.

‘‘It would give people more of an option,’’ Councillor Annette Groves said.

Councillor Nick deBoer said more research would be needed, but he wondered what the cost of changing the voting system would be.

Councillor Doug Beffort also said he would want to do more research.

‘‘My first concern is always that everybody's vote counts to the fullest,’’ he said, adding it looks like ranked ballots would help in that regard.

He also said it would be an encouragement for voters and candidates to remain in good standing with each other during the campaign.

‘‘Maybe it would just make it a little less abrasive at times,’’ he commented.

Councillor Rob Mezzapelli said he has done some research on the matter.

‘‘I think anything that gives the voter more of a say of who gets elected, if that indeed is what happens, is a good thing,’’ he commented.

One possible problem he cited is people might know a lot about the candidate they plan to vote for, but not so much about their second choice. ‘‘Are these going to be knowledgeable votes?’’ he wondered.

‘‘I guess there are pros and cons to everything,’’ Councillor Johanna Downey commented, expressing concern that switching to ranked ballots would be ‘‘adding more work to the system.’’

But she also said she would favour anything that's fair and equitable.