

Editorial ? Attendance isn't everything

There was an article last week in the Toronto Star ranking members of Toronto City Council on the number of recorded votes they missed last year.

It seems three councillors had perfect records, meaning they were on hand for all the votes, while one, Michelle Holland, missed more than half of them.

There are good reasons for keeping track of statistics like that. One of the main ones is the numbers are easy to obtain, since the results of recorded votes are kept somewhere.

But the problem with them is they might not tell the full or accurate story.

If a councillor, be they in Toronto or anywhere else, misses a vote or a meeting, it's very easy to leap to the conclusion they are goofing off. True, most of us are realistic enough to understand that perfect attendance is not always going to be possible. Missing the occasional vote because of illness or dealing with personal or family matters is pardonable.

And while we agree that missing half the recorded votes in a year is a little hard to shrug off, what many people are quick to forget is elected officials do a lot more than sit in the seats the voters put them in.

They also have to deal with other matters, such as assisting constituents with their issues. Many politicians sit on more than one body, like ad hoc committees, conservation authorities, etc., and those obligations cut into their schedules.

Early at meetings of Peel Regional Council, Regional Chair Frank Dale takes roll call, and seldom does he not make the observation that at least one member is absent on "other municipal business."

Being at as many meetings as possible is one of the obligations put on elected officials, but certainly not the only one.

As well, we shouldn't be too impressed with people who boast about perfect attendance. Indeed, when we hear someone sound off about their attendance record, we have to wonder if that's all they have to brag about.

A student can be in class every day and still flunk. It's what goes on after attendance is taken that really matters.