

Editorial ? There is a time for byelections

This week saw Toronto City council appoint two worthy citizens to join their ranks for the next couple of months. Vacancies appeared on council because two former members left their seats to successfully seek office at other levels of government. Adam Vaughan, the former councillor in the Trinity-Spadina ward, was successful in his byelection bid to take the federal seat that Olivia Chow departed to run for mayor of the megacity to the south. Activist Ceta Ramkhalawansingh has been appointed to complete his term. And Lawyer James Maloney has taken over the seat that former councillor Peter Milczyn left to successfully run in last month's Provincial election.

So the vacancies have been filled for the next couple of months.

Yet there have been complaints heard from some commentators that these seats should have been filled through by-elections.

We have gone on the record many, many times as being in favour of exercising the democratic process whenever possible.

Municipal council seats, whether they be in Caledon or Toronto, are supposed to be occupied by people who have been democratically elected by the people who are supposed to elect them, as opposed to appointment by their fellows.

But there is also a practical side to the issue. To call a byelection now, and put candidates and their families, volunteers and supporters through the stress of a campaign, not to mention the voters and municipal coffers, when they're going to have to go through the whole thing again in just a couple of months, just doesn't make a whole lot of sense.

Byelections are expensive, considering people have to be employed to work on them, locations have to be found for voting stations and there are other expenses to consider, like advertisements, etc. And that's only for the jurisdiction running the thing. The candidates themselves are put to considerable expense too. And not long after that, they would be expected to go through the whole thing again.

We have often said that democracy was meant to be many things, and dirt cheap is not on that list. But even champions of democracy are expected to use their common sense occasionally.

And according to the published reports, both Ramkhalawansingh and Maloney have indicated they have no plans to seek a full term this fall. They are simply going to occupy their respective seats until the current term has expired. The nice thing is neither of these two are going to get the leg-up in the coming campaign by running as incumbents.

True, there's very little to stop them from changing their minds between now and nomination day. In that event, they can take the issue up with their constituents.

We grant this is not the perfect way to address vacancies on any council. And if it were early in the term, we would be happy to advocate for byelections to fill them.

But with just a couple of months to go, this alternative works rather well.