

Election Sign By-Law discussion brings amendment ahead of October vote

By Riley Murphy

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

At a General Committee meeting held on March 3, Caledon Council approved amendments to the Election Sign By-Law.

A staff report came forward at the meeting recommending an Election Sign By-law review and proposed replacement, featuring changes such as a maximum three election signs per candidate or registered third party advertiser on a lot instead of the previous one candidate or advertiser per lot, the removal of streets from the public lands definition to allow for election signs to be placed in ditches or road allowances, and that the time frame of allowing placement of election signs be changed from 35 to 45 days prior to voting day.

Many Council members expressed concerns about the proposed replacement, primarily regarding environmental issues.

Councillor Christina Early stated that "environmentally, this is a disaster."

She brought forward issues such as sign pollution, the increase in days creating more "mess," and the amount of plastic that would be used in the upcoming election if the sign limit were raised from one to three.

"The other thing that really concerns me is you allude to ditches in the report, and yet if the ditch abuts a private owner, you have to get private owner approval, but I'm going to suspect that a lot of people are just going to take advantage of it when they see the word ditch," voiced Early.

Councillor Mario Russo said he sees the need for the revised timeframe, but he feels the three signs were not necessary.

"The one that concerns me the most is the election signs placement in ditches and road allowances," said Russo, adding it creates not only a safety risk but also the opportunity that those may not get permission.

Councillor Nick de Boer echoed environmental concerns, saying the proposed replacement is "a way to create more garbage."

"Many years ago, we brought the election sign bylaw in because of the fact that many, many residents didn't want to see intersections and corners all plastered with every candidate's sign and whoever could get there first got the best spot. That's what the residents of Caledon didn't want," said de Boer. "That's why we have the bylaw that we have. They didn't want to generate a pile of garbage just because we were running an election."

Councillor Dave Sheen said he also didn't see the need for the increase in signs, adding that with signs for a Regional Councillor, a Ward Councillor, a Mayor, and a Trustee, there could be up to 12 signs on one lot.

"The impact on the environment, these are non-biodegradable signs, they're going to last forever. It's a terrible insult or impact on our environment," said Sheen.

Councillor Tony Rosa stated at the last election, the issue he saw was people not following the rules, leading to the use of by-law resources.

"My concern here is more about finding rules that people will respect and follow," said Rosa, adding that an important piece for him is the enforcement.

Rosa said that no matter what number of days they decide on, he doesn't feel that By-law should have to deal with these issues
?24/7.?

Stephen Chisholm, Assistant Town Solicitor, Corporate Services, joined the conversation, explaining that the intent was to expand the by-law in a way that would ?perhaps provide the maximum amount of democratic input for residents.?

He added the specific consideration behind the increase in the time allowance for signs was that the first advanced voting date could be 30 days out from the ultimate voting date, whereas the previous by-law allowed only five days for putting up signs.

Councillor Doug Maskell voiced his support for the increase in days, but shared other Councillors' concerns about possible confusion over ?ditches.?

De Boer added that lengthening the allowance for putting up signs does not make a difference.

?You're forgetting that it's not an election where you just display signs. It's getting to the doors and knocking on doors and meeting people, and that's the work that gets involved, that you do get involved in before the advanced polling,? he says. ?I just think that creating more and more garbage in this environment, especially plastics doesn't make a lot of sense.?

Councillor Cosimo Napoli echoed safety concerns about allowing signs in road allowances and ditches.

An amendment was put forward to return the sign allowance to one, rather than three; to keep the public lands definition the same as the current election sign by-law; and to remove the section regarding where election signs may be placed or displayed adjacent to highways, including on public rights-of-way and road allowances.

The amendment was approved, and the main motion was passed.