

Now the work begins?

by BROCK WEIR

The ballots have been cast, votes have been counted and your collective efforts have determined the direction our communities will take over the next four years.

Regardless of whether or not you agree with the outcome, I can only hope you found something to vote for rather than a laundry list of things to vote against.

I don't know about the rest of you, but voting AGAINST something just isn't as satisfying as voting FOR something. Sure, if you're of that particular mindset, the idea of "sticking it to" whoever is in your crosshairs can feel good in this age of instant gratification, but that warm-and-fuzzy feeling doesn't last for four full years.

Hopefully your warm-and-fuzzies will indeed be in place for the long-haul. If not, I hope it galvanizes you to look for further opportunities to make a difference during the term ahead, or think seriously about the difference you might be able to make as a candidate when the time comes.

Having covered municipal elections in 2010, 2014, 2018, 2022, and now 2026, I consider myself well-versed in the process, particularly in the communities I cover, but this election brought about a municipal first: the first time voting in a municipal election in a community that is not part of my "beat."

It was a very unusual feeling. Perhaps due to being so immersed in the minutia of the platforms presented by each and every candidate within the "beat" areas, the fact I had more of a role to play in the civic process here beyond writing and editing candidate profiles, compiling answers to candidate questionnaires, and covering individual issues as they arose, my own choices where I live came close to being an afterthought.

Not on my watch, so I spent the better part of the week leading up to October 26 doing as deep a dive as I could into the candidates in my area. Thankfully, I found plenty to vote for "and, thankfully, not too much to vote against" and cast my ballot Monday morning, satisfied I made the decision that was best aligned with my own personal viewpoints.

I hope that's a feeling that is shared far and wide this week as Mayors-elect, Councillors-elect, and Trustees-elect, start laying the foundations for the next four years.

Those who put their names on the ballot this year are to be commended "not only for taking the initiative to develop a platform and take it door-to-door to voters, but for simply giving the electorate a choice.

According to statistics released last month by the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO), there were 400 acclamations in Ontario's municipal elections this year, a decrease from the 548 experienced in 2022. Now, of course, this could be a sign of either satisfaction with the one person to step forward for the job or a sign of apathy in that nobody else wanted it, but, at the end of the day, it's always nice to have a choice and a healthy exchange of ideas amongst candidates.

AMO's data is broken down even further. According to their stats, 104 Head of Council races (Mayor and Reeve) were acclaimed, 29 per cent of who are female. This, compared to 23 per cent of 2022 candidates being female, while, overall the number of female candidates was up seven per cent compared to the previous ballot.

Through a different lens, 19 of Ontario's 444 municipalities saw their entire Councils acclaimed back into power. This translates into five per cent of Ontario municipalities going down this route, compared to eight per cent in 2022, but it's still a staggering statistic to consider in our communities when the fight for our limited number of seats was "spirited" to say the absolute least.

To the officials in communities where the entire slate of representatives were returned without a fight, congratulations! Evidently, you're doing something right! To those who weren't content with the status quo, but still found any number of reasons to sit back and do nothing, perhaps you will take this as your cue that you need to be the change you want to see in your neighbourhood.

That, however, brings up another question I'm sure will crop up in the coming days and weeks ? why bother?

Before registrations for the 2026 Municipal Elections opened this past May, it was a question I pondered in this space in the context of our education trustees.

The outgoing municipal term was a fraught one for trustees across Ontario with the Ministry of Education keen to flex its muscles over the day-to-day operations of our school boards and trustees in both Peel and York, amongst other jurisdictions, effectively sidelined while the Ministry did just that. They kept their titles but not much else.

In a situation where the position you've been elected to can be snatched away on the turn of a dime, one could be forgiven for wondering just why candidates would invest so much time and resources in securing a seat that might be pulled out from under them. The fact they did so speaks, I believe, to their passion and drive to make a difference, but only time ? and the fickle finger of political fate ? will determine if they are given the time to meet their objectives.

But, after this election, I wonder how many candidates for other positions are also asking the question, ?Why bother??

Now that the election is behind us, I have to say that in the five municipal battles I've been involved with, this was surely the most vitriolic trip to the polls I've yet witnessed.

Thankfully, with some exceptions across Ontario, the vitriol can't be attributed to the candidates themselves, but rather some of the more engaged and passionate residents with favourite candidates in the race, and, indeed, some of the more engaged and passionate ? and often largely anonymous ? social media pundits who insinuated themselves into the conversation.

Don't get me wrong, dialogue is essential in any democracy, regardless of what level of government is being discussed, but this season was rife in online misinformation, sometimes deliberately so, along with extremely personal attacks that were based more in personal opinion than fact, objectiveless insinuations, and an overall atmosphere that was nothing less than toxic.

Those who weathered this particular storm, whether or not the votes went your way on Monday, should be commended for doing so, and a double congratulations if you resisted the urge to pile on.

Recent years have underscored just how fragile democracies the world-over can be, and they're often only as strong as the individuals who take part in it, whether their names are on the ballot or whether you're simply casting one.

If things are allowed to remain as toxic as they have been, will it be an environment where emerging community leaders will even want to jump into the race if proverbial trials-by-fire are more the rule rather than the exception? If the cost ultimately paid is far beyond the dollars handed over to process your nomination papers? If not, where will that leave our communities?

Perhaps this is a question Monday night's victors should consider as they chart their paths to 2030.