

## Recent Election Sign By-Law open house draws future campaigners

**By Riley Murphy**

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

An open house was held recently for the public to discuss the proposed changes to Caledon's Election Sign Bylaw with Town Staff, but it appeared to draw more than just those looking to see the proposals.

Current Councillors and residents attended the meeting to learn more about the election sign by-law as it may relate to their potential run in the upcoming election.

One of those was resident Kate Hepworth.

Hepworth ran in the previous election for Ward 1 Councillor in 2022, and told *The Citizen* she plans to run in October's municipal election.

Although she says she won't be running a "high profile campaign" this year, she says she was interested to see the changes, as she lost quite a few signs in the previous election.

Keeping it green, she says she'll be using signs from the last election.

"I'm not fond of people coming to my front door to sell themselves on something," says Hepworth. "That's just my reality, I won't be out there a lot, you may not see a lot of signs but I'm still here."

"There's so much that's going on and doing things from one side of the table and I just need to be able to try from the other side of the table with like-minded people that want to see the changes and securing our green areas and things like that without getting down and dirty. We all know the issues in Ward 1, and I just want to try, I need to try."

Another resident at the open house was also a past candidate, Hunar Kahlon, who ran for Ward 2 Councillor, who says he is "seriously considering" running in the upcoming election.

He adds that sign bylaws vary from municipality to municipality, so he attended in hopes of learning what changes may be coming to Caledon's.

At the open house, he echoed many of the concerns raised during the March 3 General Committee meeting, saying that three signs would have been "abused," and that he hoped Council would reconsider and not go ahead with the proposed change.

If he does decide to run in the upcoming election, he says many of the issues that appeared when he ran in 2022 "are still here."

"They've only amplified, or the new ones popped up. I wouldn't say that nothing changed for good, but there's a lot of work that needs to be done. There's a ton of work for the Council coming in," says Kahlon, adding that there needs to be a way to encourage more voter turnout in this year's election.

One of the first Councillors at the event was Councillor Doug Maskell, who told *The Citizen* that when it comes to the upcoming election, he is "considering all of his options" as many residents in wards 1, 2, and 3 have encouraged him to be a candidate for the position of Regional Councillor.

Bringing him to the open house was a chance to review the proposed changes and discuss some of his concerns with staff and

residents.

Joking that in the last election he lost eight pounds from all the door knocking, he aims to beat that number this year.

Councillor Mario Russo told the Citizen he is planning on running in the upcoming election.

He attended the open house in hopes of hearing feedback from residents on any public expectations for changes, and also hear staff's recommendations prior to the committee meeting.

Regarding the upcoming election, he says previously he enjoyed going door to door and hearing from residents, "nothing changes or replaces going door-to-door because everyone's got a different perspective, so I look forward to that. I look forward to meeting more of the residents and look forward to some good dialogue, and it's an educational piece even for ourselves, so we never stop learning."

Councillor Christina Early told The Citizen she is also planning to run in the upcoming election and is looking forward to it, but what truly brought her to the open house were the environmental impacts, which she later discussed at Council.

"We've seen sign pollution, especially in some of the upper levels of government. When you run provincially or you run federally, they really have access to a lot of ditches and road corners, and it's not a pretty sight. I think we had it pretty much in control in the past. I'd like to see it stay the same," says Early at the open house.

Councillor Dave Sheen also attended the open house, and told the Citizen that attending the open house "was about doing my homework as a Councillor, not signalling a campaign decision. But I will say that representing my neighbours on Council has been an honour and a privilege that I do not take lightly, and I have yet to make a firm decision about running again."

He had also voiced his concerns, which he later brought up in Council, about the impacts the proposed changes would have.

"One sign per candidate on a typical suburban lot is more than enough to show support. Going from one to three signs for the same candidate on the same small property doesn't really send a stronger democratic message; it just adds to the clutter," Sheen says.

"Modern election signs are expensive and, in my experience, made from non-biodegradable plastics, so I'm not convinced that producing more signs for elections lines up with our community's environmental values either."