

Representation Matters

by SHERALYN ROMAN

It seems we are still in "election mode," or at the very least, still talking about matters of representation. While today's focus is largely municipal, concerning a possible change to how our Regional Councillors are elected, for Caledon residents south of King, you may also want to pay attention to a change in your federal political boundaries.

Also related to voting and having your say in matters that impact all Caledon residents, is the forthcoming potential change to Town by-laws concerning short term rental housing. Speaking of housing, there's the additional matter of a small housing development coming soon to Alton. In short, there's a lot going on municipally and federally and representation matters, so make time in your busy schedules to have your say!

First things first, here's a summary of the easiest change in case you missed it. The southern boundaries of Caledon have now been added to the northern boundaries of Brampton to create a new federal riding. That means those Caledon residents residing south of King, but north of Mayfield Road, and whose residences are located between Caledon's eastern and western boundaries of The Gore Rd. and Winston Churchill Blvd., are now part of the "Brampton North-Caledon" riding.

Make sure you familiarize yourself with your local candidates so that you are not in for a shock when you get to the ballot box. You can visit [electionscanada.ca](#) to learn who your local candidates are. Of greater concern of course, might be how this shift in representation potentially impacts the interests of south Caledon residents, but I don't think we were asked for our thoughts on that! One wonders about the logic behind fragmenting a town into two distinct federal ridings.

Representation matters, but not apparently by asking for our input.

Next up, and speaking of the potential for fragmentation, we have the recently proposed changes to how Regional Councillors might be elected by Caledon residents. You may have missed this announcement too "mostly because there wasn't really an announcement."

Instead, a report to Council in early March provided an overview of the last municipal election process, including a cost summary. You may recall, the last election saw Caledon divided into new Ward boundaries, and also reflected changes at the Region of Peel resulting in a reduced number of Regional Councillors representing Caledon.

Presumably, this report was done in part to assess the impacts of those two changes. However, for no particular reason that appeared obvious to this reader, the report then goes on to propose three possible changes to how Regional Councillors are elected in the future, suggesting an "alternative to the tri-ward regional representation would be to elect two Regional Councillors through a one Town-wide race, top two winner model. The top two candidates who receive the most "at-large" or Town-wide general votes would join the Mayor in representing the Town of Caledon."

The report seems to lean heavily toward this model, instead of the current "tri-ward" method which, for clarification, means we vote for a Regional Councillor based on the ward we live in. Wards 1, 2 & 3 are represented by one Regional Councillor and Ward 4, 5, & 6 by a second one.

Not surprisingly, this potential change caused considerable debate amongst both our Ward and Regional representatives, specifically as to the merits of making such a change, and whether or not the public had (or should be) invited to comment on the matter.

Here's why it matters.

The unique nature of Caledon is that it's both an urban and rural community. While Regional Councillors are rightly tasked with

representing the interests of ALL Caledon residents at the Regional table, it's imperative they also bring specific knowledge of the interests, issues and concerns of the wards they represent, and in Caledon those interests will be different based on where you are located.

Pointing, as some Councillors and our Mayor did, to areas like Vaughan and Mississauga as having 'at large' voting processes in place is simply not relevant given those cities are both completely urbanized communities.

Throughout the debate, Councillors like Kiernan from Ward 1 pointed out that if 'at large' voting takes place and both Regional Councillors are elected from the same ward, other town residents will feel under-represented. Meanwhile, Councillors Sheen and Maskell emphasized the importance of, and need for, public consultation in this matter, Maskell going so far as to suggest a public consultation process should be embedded into the bylaw process because 'it's a significant change.' Councillor deBoer (and others) pointed out an obvious concern, that with 'at large voting' potential candidates will concentrate their efforts where the numbers (votes) are, meaning smaller hamlets and communities that don't have as many residents may never see or hear from a potential candidate, nor feel they have truly had their say in the voting process because sheer numbers of population in other wards will outweigh their vote.

Certainly throughout the debate all Councillors agreed that a Regional Councillor should represent all of Caledon, but some more specifically called for the process for selecting those Regional Councillors to also ensure everyone feels represented. To them, that means the current tri-ward (Wards 1, 2, & 3 and wards 4, 5, & 6) voting method helps to ensure there is equal weight applied to both rural and urban interests.

For those residents who do indeed want to have their say on this matter, thanks at least in part to Councillors, including Kiernan, Early, Maskell, Sheen and deBoer, you will now have the opportunity to do so on April 15.

As referenced at the outset of this column, other voting matters are also on the table that may have a direct impact on residents but as usual, I've carried on a bit too long and we're running short on space. Let's just say this; if you have concerns about 'short-term rental housing' (otherwise, at least in part, known as Air BnBs) you might want to pay attention to the Council agenda for April 10. For those living in Alton and concerned about a new housing development, you too might want to attend or delegate at Council, and that meeting is taking place April 15.

Remember, representation matters as does the opportunity for residents to share and voice their concerns. It's part of the democratic process and while you didn't get a say in the federal riding demarcations, make sure you avail yourself of the opportunity to have your say at the local level.

Finally, I would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge the many acts of kindness by all of our neighbours, the community at large, local businesses, and the efforts of the town, in ensuring all Caledon residents were taken care of as best, and as quickly as possible during the recent ice storm.

From opening restaurants, golf courses, coffee shops and community centres, to neighbours helping neighbours, and all of the hardworking hydro employees - thank you to everyone for helping to ensure no one felt abandoned.