

Less than 32% vote in King Township

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It is well documented that voter turnout for municipal elections is often considerably lower than voter participation in provincial or federal elections. This election was no different in King where only 5,802 of the 18,365 eligible voters actually cast a ballot. This equals a voter turnout under 32%, less than one-third.

Many news articles highlight the fact that there is a general trend in many western nations of decreasing voter participation over the past 20 years. One wonders why, and what can be done to engage citizens more and exercise their right to vote.

For this year's municipal election in King, significant efforts were made to engage voters in several ways. To begin, individual Voter Cards were sent to all registered voters many weeks before the election. In addition, the Township of King website provided basic information about all the candidates who were registered, including contact information and links to websites set up by several candidates. King also organized several Advanced Polls around the township for early voting, plus made proxy forms available. The King Weekly Sentinel ran a series of informative articles featuring the candidates running in each ward, and provided notices regarding all candidates meetings and other election information.

Concerned Citizens of King Township (CCKT) organized two all candidates meetings, and later posted a video of each meeting on the CCKT website. In addition the citizens' group created a questionnaire that was sent to each candidate, and responses were posted on the website for public viewing. Further, CCKT leveraged its significant social media presence using its Facebook Page, YouTube channel and Twitter feed to further broadcast this information to King voters.

And perhaps most significant of all, many candidates participated in active campaigning by knocking on doors of constituents, listening to concerns and sharing platform goals.

In spite of all these efforts, voter turnout remained low. Many ask, "What can be done to have citizens become better engaged and exercise their right to vote?"

On-line voting and telephone voting were used in many municipalities across Ontario this year. Could this be helpful in King?

Studies suggest that e-voting can increase voter participation by providing this convenient form of voting in the lives of people with busy work schedules and family commitments.

Many voters wonder if their vote really matters. Given the close results in Wards 1 and Ward 3, it is clear that each vote does count and can make a difference.

Use of social media, ranked ballots and proportional representation are other ideas being offered to help engage voters more.

Ultimately, there is a more poignant question we each must ask ourselves, "Of what value is my vote, and will I participate?"

With all this said, we recognize a new council for King Township has been elected, albeit by a relatively small number of voters, and now citizens have an opportunity to participate and make their voices heard in the matters of community interest and concern. A new Official Plan for King. Preserving and growing the Greenbelt. Creating vibrant, healthy and unique communities in King. Who will participate?