

It's easy to be part of your community's future

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Democracy is a great thing.

It allows for citizens to become engaged and fully involved in the process, even if it is only every four years on the municipal front. Traditionally, the fewest people venture to the polls during municipal elections, with more showing an interest in provincial and federal politics.

But the municipal level is the heart of our lives, not to mention the closest, most accessible level of government we have. This is grass roots politics and democracy. This is where our homes are.

Our representatives and the staff of expert planners, engineers, parks and emergency personnel work on our behalf. From sewers to sidewalks, roads and local strip malls, our local councils make decisions that directly impact our daily lives.

How we interact with our neighbours is a function of how our communities came together in the first place and the decisions made along the way.

King Township is very lucky in many respects.

This municipality is, in many ways, a warm, inviting and busy place to live and work. It exudes small town qualities, despite the fact it's facing development on all fronts, in all villages and rural areas.

But these new developments, by and large, have not detracted from the charm and 'feel' of this place. Many people who work throughout the GTA remark that coming home to King every day is like a breath of fresh air.

And it has taken a concerted effort by residents, politicians and staff to make it so.

That's no easy task. It takes a community to affect change.

Locally, our politicians and staff are unbelievably approachable. The same cannot be said in neighbouring municipalities where getting the mayor on the phone is next to impossible. Not only are our elected officials accessible, they are involved and have the pulse of the community.

Again, at no other level do officials have such a hands-on approach. And that's a very good thing.

Through a community led initiative, King has its unique and innovative Integrated Community Sustainability Plan, something that was years in the making. This document now stands as our road map to the future and all staff reports are directly tied to these fundamental guidelines. It's almost like we have our own 'Declaration of Independence.'

The past term in King has seen a whirlwind of changes, improvements and innovations. All of this municipality's strategic plans have, or are in the process of, being updated and revamped. We are well prepared to meet the future head-on.

A lot of construction has taken place and there's more on the horizon. In most cases, decisions were made in keeping with residents' wishes while maintaining the look and feel of King. Council has, time and again, put its foot down and not shied away from telling developers, builders and retail giants just what they expect from them.

Locally, King residents are aware, active and not shy about voicing their opinions. Council meetings are well attended and again, in nearby townships you're lucky if 10 people show up for a meeting. Our council also shows a great deal of flexibility in allowing people to come forward and speak. No one should be intimidated by the process, and for the most part, the doors at King Township are wide open.

These things are not inherent to our system. They are made that way by the people involved. From reception and the Township clerk, to the fire chief and CAO, an atmosphere conducive to citizen participation has been created.

People like to throw around the terms "transparency" and "accountability." Trust me on this, King has both in spades. Again, this takes time to develop.

I've also noticed that the atmosphere at town hall and among staff is one of camaraderie. They enjoy coming to work. Kudos to senior staff who've helped create this atmosphere, which actually improves production and efficiency.

Now, to the nitty gritty of the election.

The opening salvos were unleashed by the four men vying to become the next Ward 2 councillor.

The centre of it all is Nobleton, a quaint village that has seen a lot of change in the past few years, with more to come. Nobleton is not unlike King City or Schomberg. People want their streets to be safe. They want sidewalks, traffic calming measures and people-friendly cores. They want to feel part of the bigger picture.

And they want to feel that their concerns and issues are acknowledged and addressed. That's the job of every councillor.

All four candidates are capable and show a passion for their community. Hats off to those who've taken this step to enter local politics. It's not for everyone.

It was nice to see such a large and interested crowd on hand - proof that Nobleton's citizenry does care. There's a bit of a rift between the new residents and long-term residents, but that won't stand in the way of the village's progress.

Some made the comment that they feel out of the loop when it comes to information about Township meetings, issues and decisions.

Some councillors are quite good at using social media and given the changes in technology, more people can be reached.

While I'm biased, I will say the best source of local information is this very newspaper. The Township has a page in each issue that identifies issues, concerns, upcoming meetings, hearings, bylaws, etc. We cover all council and public meetings. The onus is on the public to take the time to read and be informed. Is it that difficult to pick up the paper at the end of the driveway or visit us online to find out what's going on all around you?

Be informed. Be part of the solution and the future. Exercise your privilege to have your say on Oct. 27.