

Democracy in action at the local level

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Taxpayers deserve accountability.

And they deserve an open, frank explanation of where their money goes.

That's exactly what they got during the first "Meet the Mayor & Ward Councillors" forum held in Nobleton. Led by Mayor Steve Pellegrini and Councillors Linda Pabst and David Boyd, the informal session was informative, engaging and revealing.

Pellegrini instituted these discussions last term as a way of reaching out and engaging citizens. He wanted them to come out, ask direct questions of their councillors. He wants them to share their concerns, voice their opinions and get the facts.

He was in his element Feb. 4 at the Nobleton Library when more than two dozen residents came out. They were listened to; explanations were given and all were made to feel as if their concerns meant something.

That's exactly how things are supposed to be in our democratic society. No one, especially the taxpayers of King, should be made to feel isolated or ignored.

The mayor is a fountain of knowledge. He knows every square inch of King and what's happening in every neighbourhood. He has his finger on the pulse at York Region, and is King's only voice at the regional council table. He has the answers, whether you're talking development, DCs, roads, growth, sewers or high-speed Internet.

It's at events like these that residents really see their elected officials in action. You should be comforted by the fact they really know their stuff. They're not just pedantic yes men and women, but true community leaders who understand the big picture. They want their residents engaged and informed. They want you to care as much as they do.

The atmosphere at the first discussion was light. I'm sure people had their questions, concerns and were equally emotional about their communities. But tempers were checked at the door and the discussions were open, honest, direct and even light-hearted at times.

One man had no use for what's referred to as "gateway features" and village beautification. He called it "uglification" and felt his tax dollars could be better spent elsewhere.

Perhaps. But in my humble opinion, these aesthetic additions are important physical features. It's part of civic pride. There are some in this community, the mayor included, who would shout King's praises from the rooftop every chance he gets. Others would favour a King Township flag or banner and still others would support a motto and mascot. It's all good.

King Township has a long and coloured history -- a pride of ownership. This shouldn't be ignored or downplayed. If well placed gardens, pillars or signage makes residents and visitors smile, it's worth every penny.

And don't worry about your tax dollars. King is adept at leveraging every cent they can from sponsors, developers and York Region. King has very high build standards and demands every new addition suits the community. And that's the way it should be. No one should be shy about raising the bar, in keeping with our adopted themes.

Traffic is a constant concern in this rural area that's dotted with some major commuter routes. Let's face it, pressures from beyond our borders drives local traffic volumes. Speed enforcement measures by York Regional Police tend to simply drive the cars and trucks to other roads.

While we can't change history, or the locations of Highways 9, 27 and 400, we can try to manage and mitigate traffic.

York Region is working on its traffic master plan and some local concerns are being addressed.

They're looking at what can alleviate some of the problems at local intersections ? Highway 27 and King Road; King and the 11th, and King and Weston Road, to name a few. The mayor assured these will be addressed, and we'll see a "slip lane" (passing lane around left-turners)?at the 11th this summer.

Traffic is a major concern throughout the GTA. Motorists are anxiously awaiting transit initiatives, the 427 extension and the route of the new east-west corridor.

King wants to make its hamlets attractive and more pedestrian-friendly. This will mean more aesthetic features and traffic calming initiatives. Drivers need to know that our villages are just that ??places to slow down, admire and do business in. This may sound like a never-ending battle, but once everyone, and every level of government is on-side, it can be addressed.

Property standards are an issue in every rural municipality. Some residents, by the very nature of their secluded properties, take liberties and push the envelopes of local planning rules. There are non-conforming business uses, illegal apartments and accessory buildings. This is a tough nut to crack, but it just goes to show how important tenant screening is, so you can get a good idea of a tenant before they move into a property. Tenant screening is explained best by [AAOA](#). The municipality must first be made aware of the alleged wrong-doings, send in bylaw staff to investigate, and determine whether further action is necessary. Sometimes it leads to shutting down a business or evicting tenants ??neither of which is ideal. But rules are rules. The drawback is that escalating these matters and going to court is a costly and time-consuming process.

All of these things, and many more, are legitimate concerns. Residents live here for many reasons, not the least of which is enjoying their piece of paradise and hoping others respect their privacy. They pay a premium to live here in the form of high taxes. They enjoy King's wide-open spaces and limited growth potential. They love the easy access to major commuter routes.

In a perfect world, every question, comment and criticism is addressed and every problem is solved.

Our politicians are listening.

I would encourage everyone to call their local councillor, Township staff or the mayor himself if you have a pressing concern.

Attend the next meet and greet session Wednesday, March 25 at the Schomberg Library, running 6:30 to 8 p.m. The mayor and Councillor Bill?Cober will be on hand to answer your questions.

Don't make it easy for them!