



Keep Elections Visible and Fair - Delegation to Town Council Feb 23, 2015

Good evening my name is Janet Haslett-Theall and tonight I am here once again on behalf of the Joshua Creek Residents' Association board. Let me begin by thanking you and those who have turned out tonight for your consideration of our views.

As you will have read in the letter we submitted to Council two weeks ago we are very concerned that Town Council is once again considering banning election signs on public property. Ward 3 had the largest number of candidates in the past election and yes Ford Drive was sign crazy. However, **we believe that for the short period of time election signs are allowed, their presence on our public lands is important part of a fair and democratic election.**

Let me begin by being clear on what we are asking of you. Tonight we ask that you vote down the motion to ban signs on public property. That instead you seek solutions that respect the importance of Fair Visible Elections. Solutions that put reasonable limits only, on the number of election signs, while protecting and ensuring their visibility in the public forum.

Why are we concerned?

Some advocates of a ban have suggested that access to private lawns to advertise is sufficient and therefore a ban is fair.

Incumbents have resident email lists not available to other candidates! Incumbents often have a strong and established social media presence which opponents have not had the opportunity to develop as these lists come from contacts with constituents while in office. Incumbents can quickly and easily **dominate** the private property signage through contacting their lists. Nothing we have read or heard discussed regarding this issue, addresses this unfair advantage for incumbents.

Election signs on public lands allow candidates to build name recognition while allowing incumbents fair access to the same public space. Building name recognition is critical for opponents as they campaign door to door and ask voters for their support. Posting an election sign serves as notice these individuals are interested in serving the public good.

Do signs make a difference?

Signs start the name recognition process particularly in municipal elections. If advertising your name/business is not effective why are people paying the town to advertise on the medians? The Government of Canada website that seeks to educate newcomers to Canada and students about democracy states in explaining campaigning the following 'a candidate tells voters his or her message in many different ways;' The website then proceeds to list first "election signs" and even encourage a discussion on what message different signs convey. We all know signs create a presence and they are more cost effective than newspaper advertising that is why you used them in your election campaigns and we support you should have the choice.

Where we seem to disagree is; do election signs belong in the public forum. Elections are a public matter. They are core part of who we are as Canadians. **Residents have the right to be informed in a**

public self- evident manner of who is running for election. Transparency in this process is fundamental to democracy. No one candidate should get an unfair advantage to dominate the landscape.

Doesn't social media mean we don't need signs?

No, campaigns rely on signs for visibility. Candidates will use social media to build on their name recognition. Public elections belong in the public forum, visible to all not just those who are tech savvy and have readily available online access.

What about the environment?

Parts of signs are recyclable like other elements of our daily lives.

What about the visual landscape?

For the few short weeks every election we see signs their presence does not damage the beauty or livability of Oakville.

What about the number of signs?

Put limits and controls on the number of signs to something more reasonable but banning signs is extreme In the West Rivers Residents Association letter to Town Council they state: *"We feel that banning all signs on public property is a solution out of proportion to the problem, and we do not support that. What we do support is Council finding ways to mitigate either the placement or the number of signs permitted during a campaign, and we hope that you will pursue a resolution to the problem in these areas."*

Janet Haslett-Theall is the President of the Joshua Creek Residents' Association (JCRA).