

January 28, 2015

Banning of Election Signs in Oakville

The JCRA board is concerned that Town Council is once again considering banning election signs on public property. We recognize that for 4-5 weeks this fall Ford Drive was sign crazy. We also had the largest number of candidates of all the wards. However, we believe that for the short period of time signs are allowed, they do spark us all to do our research; to get out and vote and to celebrate our right to choose public representation.

Election signs create a level playing field for new candidates by allowing them to build name recognition and serve as notice to their fellow citizens that they are interested in serving the public good. We are deeply concerned that banning elections signs on public property creates an advantage to incumbents. Incumbents have resident email lists not available to others and they often have a strong and established social media presence which a new candidate may not have developed to the same degree.

What about good old fashioned door-to-door campaigning and private property lawn signs?

Meeting constituents is certainly an important part of a successful campaign, but incumbents have the private property lawn sign advantage as they already have name recognition and established relationships with residents. Building name recognition is really important for newcomers as they campaign door to door and ask homeowners for their support by having a lawn sign.

What about social media?

Of course, but 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?

There are ways to make elections signs more environmentally friendly and those who have them should be recognized for their efforts.

What about the number of signs?

Putting limits on the number of signs to something more reasonable is worth exploring but banning signs is extreme.

The big question is what harm are we doing by having elections signs?

Is there not greater harm to the democratic election process by eliminating the visibility of elections within our neighbourhoods? At a time when voter turnout is not what it should be, should we make elections less visible? We should be broadening our democracy not narrowing it.

What are other cities doing?

Some will say our neighbours to the west and east have banned signs on public property. That does not make it right. Halton Region has now passed a bylaw banning signs on their roads. Unfortunately it was done at the last regional council meeting prior to the election with no public consultation and the change is effective the next election.

We hope that for the few weeks a year or every few years that we have elections. you will agree that banning election signs on public property is going too far. We want to hear from you regarding your views.

Please send your feedback to us at president@joshuacreek.org or members@joshuacreek.org

Sincerely,
The JCRA Board