

Why Bother Voting? – Because Local is “Where It’s At”

Local elections are often dismissed as being “second hand” with nothing much at stake. And with at least some justification local elections have previously been deemed “irrelevant”. Turnout can often be low, particularly when council elections are being held after and/or during a close provincial or federal vote as the former played out in June.

It is not unusual to find around two-thirds voters staying at home, and only around a third casting a vote for their local council candidates and mayor.

This is not helped by the perception that local councils have very little power. The Greater Kingston Chamber of Commerce has considered the reasons for low turnout in local elections in recent years, making some inroads and trying new ideas such as accountability reports, higher exposure for candidates and assisting in promoting new voting methods and highlighting new electoral boundaries.

Elections provide voters with a choice of competing candidates, platforms, and parties. They provide a mechanism for holding representatives to account for their performance in office and allow citizens a degree of control over their elected representatives. If you don’t like what they are doing, don’t just stay at home, get out there and vote for a candidate who may do a better job. Holding them accountable for their performance is vital.

The heated debate over how planning will affect the local landscape, including zoning and city development plus vibrant campaigns to preserve heritage and local public services such as libraries has demonstrated how people are deeply engaged with what happens in their communities.

Some councils like Kingston have tried to engage people in decision making through engagement and committee participation. But control and leadership of a council can lead to very different public policies being pursued.

They say all politics is local. Well, now it is your chance to make that a reality. Think about how many times you’ve sat back, talked to friends and work colleagues and complained about “councilors making the worst decisions” or Kingston being stuck in the 1800s and “never wanting to move forward” or not open for business. We recently discovered a political cartoon in our Chamber archives from the 1950s which shows a business person being kicked out of city hall as “council doesn’t like progress”. You often hear this today.

However it is unfair to say this because over the past 2 decades, Kingston has experienced great change under trying circumstances. A windswept change in the economy and industry has been occurring alongside good development and exciting new buildings, business and future infrastructure in the city. Your city council has been responsible for a lot of it. So what we need is to continue thinking forwards, balance the

progress we desire with the historical significance we admire. Look well to your ballot on October 22nd. All local candidate info and accountability reports are available at kingstonchamber.ca