

Open Letter Issued by the Bureau of Municipal Research, 137 Wellington Street West, Toronto 1



An independent fact-finding organization
reporting to the public on civic affairs.

CIVIC AFFAIRS

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CANDIDATES FOR ELECTION (*Nominations*)

Follow Citizens:

The slogan 'Vote as you like but vote' will soon signal election time in Toronto municipalities. This appeal is a product of the genuine alarm felt by many citizens at the low election turnouts year after year. Recently it has not been without some results. In the city proper, it helped to boost the vote for mayor from a total representation of less than 35 percent of electors in 1947 to a 45 percent poll in January 1948. This December, the campaign should be aimed at bringing out more than 50 percent of the qualified voters.

Nominations Come First

The selection of those who are to represent our interests on local Councils, Boards of Education and as elected Utility Commissioners in the suburbs is an important public responsibility. Voting is one part of this job, but the first charge, and the more basic, is to nominate suitable candidates.

For many of us, concern with nominations seems to be the job we leave to the other fellow. Obviously we cannot all put forward candidates for office, but responsible citizens have a clear interest in seeing that good contenders are in the field. This is one of the best ways of bringing out a large vote. Failure to participate in nominations may leave us with a very poor choice at election time. Frequently, too, it results in acclamations which take the selection of some representatives entirely out of our hands.

In the Toronto suburbs, thirty percent of elective offices were filled for 1948 without a vote. Acclamations were less common in the city where only two members of Council and two Trustees were unopposed. Acclamations are, of course, no automatic sign of civic lethargy. Some are a well-deserved tribute to outstanding public servants. But it is doubtful if all forty-five acclamations in the metropolitan area

were the result of unanimous and enthusiastic support of the citizen-body. When viewed along with the lack of interest in voting and in nomination meetings, the likely conclusion is that here is another weak girder in the bridge linking the community with its governing bodies.

In very small centres, it would be a simple matter to call together all the voters for a nomination meeting. Where everyone was well known it would be possible to ensure good candidates on the spot. Today, in Toronto, candidates are apt to be folk of whom most voters have only flimsy knowledge. Suburban contenders are more likely to be known to the electorate, but even in smaller suburbs like Weston or Long Branch many people are not well acquainted with their neighbours or the leading personalities in town. The result is that nomination meetings have lost much of their original importance; they are now, in practice, little more than the official times for filing nomination papers. Toronto calls its meeting to select Board of Control and Mayorality contestants at 10 o'clock in the morning; Councillors and Trustees are nominated in the wards between 12 noon and one o'clock on the same day. Half the suburbs have called their nomination 'meetings' for the noon hour. This timetable will hardly encourage a large turnout of electors prepared to nominate candidates and to give these candidates a screening. Nevertheless, the present-day trend gives emphasis to one important point about nominations. To ensure good candidates, the voters need to act well in advance of nomination meetings.

Your Bureau is convinced that steps must be taken to bring greater interest in the choice of candidates, but it does not advocate a wholesale increase in the number of nominations. The first job of every active voter is to find out something about present representatives and announced candidates. In Toronto, few contestants run for office under party labels. This formal rejection of party does not detract from civic efficiency and may, in fact, increase it. But it does lend emphasis to the warning to know your candidates.

It is also a wise move to make certain that this year's members who merit re-election intend to run again and they should be assured of support at the polls. A little encouragement from the electorate is not too much to ask for men and women who are making a genuine contribution to local government at no small personal sacrifice. For while some representatives may give us a low return per salary dollar, there are many who put in very long hours of useful work for their municipality.

Frequently the complaint is that no suitable candidate is in the field for some civic office. Yet surely the root answer to this criticism lies squarely with the electors. It is up to them to use the nomination machinery to bring forward new contenders and perhaps to re-examine the feasibility of allowing their own names to go before the voters.

Why are difficulties encountered in getting enough good candidates to run for office? An understandable aversion to the rough-and-tumble

of political life influences many men and women. On this continent leading citizens have too often refused to have anything to do personally with government until flagrant corruption generates a crusade for reform. But, short of scandal, civic government can only limp along when there is sustained reluctance on the part of the best citizens to enter the political arena.

A second argument is that the time which must be given over to election campaigning seems to the busy person out of all proportion to the hours available for work of direct service to the municipality. Electioneering invades Council and Board meetings. It would not be so bad if it happened every two or three years, but today civic business suffers this interruption for several weeks each year. Toronto, for example, has had its fill of this over most of the fall sessions of Council. It is a good argument for lengthening the term of office beyond one year.

Popularity of Longer Term

Hydro users have learned that south-western Ontario is a twenty-five cycle island in a continent largely served by sixty cycle current. Ontario municipalities cling to the one-year term in equally splendid isolation. Virtually all local officials in the United States are elected for a period of two years or longer. The practice of three-year terms is common to all Councillors in England and in most municipalities there it is a staggered term with one-third of the members going to the electors each year. In provinces other than Ontario, the two-year or three-year term has been widely adopted and, as in England, the staggered term is favoured over the straight term.

For many years Bureau bulletins have pressed for adoption of the three-year staggered term. This would require a change in the provincial law. However, a provincial statute enacted in 1946 enables municipalities to adopt a two-year term either 'straight' or 'staggered'. Thirty-eight municipalities have now acted on this legislation, among them the Town of Mimico. Toronto electors were given an opportunity to vote on this question on January 1, 1947. But they were asked to pass on only the straight term, in spite of the fact that eight of the ten Ontario cities with a two-year term had chosen the staggered form of elections. The vote was close and suggests that with the full alternative before them, the longer term of the staggered type might have been chosen.

The indecision and manoeuvring of City Council on civic salaries is a clear example of the damage which annual elections of the full Council can cause in the conduct of civic affairs. Both in city and suburbs, the two-year staggered term should be given a trial. It would help to expedite business and to encourage high-calibre nominees. Some members of City Council have already stated that they would favour such a change; all candidates should be asked to outline their stand on this significant question.

Nomination meetings have been scheduled for all municipalities in greater Toronto. Here is an abridged timetable.

	<u>Place</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>
East York	Coxwell & Mortimer	Nov. 26	1:00 p.m.
Etobicoke	Islington (Twp. Hall)	Nov. 26	1:00 p.m.
Forest Hill	Council Chamber	Nov. 26	1:00 p.m.
Leaside	Bessborough School	Nov. 26	7:30 p.m.
Long Branch	South School	Nov. 26	7:30 p.m.
Mimico	Town Hall	Nov. 26	7:30 p.m.
New Toronto	Seventh Street School	Nov. 26	7:30 p.m.
North York	5145 Yonge Street	Nov. 26	7:00 p.m.
Scarborough	Township Hall	Nov. 26	1:00 p.m.
Swansea	Town Hall	Dec. 15	12:00 noon
Weston	Town Hall	Nov. 24	7:30 p.m.
York Twp.	40 Jarvis Street	Dec. 17	12:00 noon

City of Toronto

Mayor and Controllers	City Hall	Dec. 10	10:00 a.m.
Ward Reps.			
Ward 1	Riverdale Collegiate		
Ward 2	Winchester Street School		
Ward 3	Wellesley School		
Ward 4	Lansdowne School	Dec. 10	12:00 noon
Ward 5	Harbord Collegiate		
Ward 6	Kent School		
Ward 7	Annette Street School		
Ward 8	Kew Beach School		
Ward 9	North Toronto Collegiate		

The Bureau abides by its frequent emphasis on getting out the vote, and it joins with this a strong recommendation for greater participation in the whole process of selecting candidates. Citizens should take up and act on the knowledge that a good council is built on the capacity and integrity of its original raw material--the candidates whom electors have nominated.

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