

Thoughts on a municipal election where things are heating up nicely

More to the Story

By Ben Bennett

All of a sudden, the distant municipal election is very much on the horizon, barely two months away. And things are getting interesting.

The emergence of a sixth candidate for mayor can be seen as good and bad news for the two leading contenders.

Jason Blokhuis offers those looking for a less right-wing alternative to Karen Farbridge a place to go, which could split the anti-Farbridge vote.

But that very middle position also means those who aren't thrilled with the current mayor but fear a Cam Guthrie-led administration also have a place to go.

If his website is anything to go by, Mr. Blokhuis, while late into the game, has taken time to lay out where he sits philosophically, and he makes some salient observations about the current state of play.

But the emergence of a seventh candidate for mayor this past week is likely good news for the Farbridge camp.

Andrew Donovan has also laid out his world view on a website. He brings an unashamedly libertarian perspective to the election, with a heavy emphasis on privatization and property rights. He could well take votes from the Guthrie campaign, if he gains any traction.

The other three candidates for mayor have not so far revealed too much about their plans and it is entirely their business if and when they choose to do so. Until then however, they will unlikely be seen as serious contenders.

Mr. Blokhuis hopes his entry into the race will start a meaningful conversation about the issues rather than an "I'm not him, I'm not her" contest. I imagine we all share that hope.

The latest lawsuit against the city is by a local builder upset about how much the company has to pay in development charges and associated fees. This merely reinforces the city's point that these things happen all the time in today's business climate, and do not necessarily constitute a scandal. Ultimately, the courts will decide, but clearly these fees have not slowed down development in this town. Every time I turn

around, it seems, another field is flattened, scraped and paved. It doesn't seem to matter which political stripe controls city hall.

In the councillor races, the incumbents in Wards One and Two are keeping us all guessing about their intentions. They have until September 12 to file their papers. Unless there is major local discontent on an issue in either ward, chances are the incumbents will be returned, should they choose to run. If not, look for Terry O'Connor to do well in Ward One, with past candidate Karolyne Pickett not far behind. Eleven candidates ran in Ward One last time out, so we'll see a few more hats in the ring if either of the incumbents decides to call it quits. I expect we'll see at least two other candidates running in Ward Two, one of which would be no stranger to the horseshoe, and another who is no stranger to the hustings (note: former councillor Ray Ferraro signed up as this was submitted to the Mercury.)

In Ward Three, both Maggie Laidlaw and June Hofland are running again, and they face some strong candidates, two of which have done well in the past. So it will be close, but I doubt we'll see any change. If there is a tide turning however, it would likely carry Craig Chamberlain to the council chamber.

Ward Four is wide open with Gloria Kovach not running and Cam Guthrie aiming for the mayor's chair. Past councillor Mike Salisbury and school board trustee Linda Busuttill likely have the edge, but we can expect to see more familiar names on the ballot in this ward. Curiously, this is where perennial candidate Gary Walton is planning run, even though he lives the other side of the city. He represented Ward Two in the 1990s, and came sixth in Ward One last time.

Ward Five is tough to call, as past councillor Cathy Downer takes on incumbents Leanne Piper and Lise Burcher. It is currently a three-way race but I wouldn't be surprised if a right-of-centre candidate were to appear. My guess is we'll see one incumbent returned and a familiar face back in the horseshoe.

Ward Six has three first-time candidates challenging Karl Wettstein and Todd Dennis. Again, absent major local discontent on an issue in the ward, chances are the incumbents will be returned.

(Ben Bennett's past columns can be found at www.bbc.guelph.org.)