

BUDGET COMMITTEE – FEBRUARY 20, 2007

TASK FORCE ON DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION AND RENEWAL

Recommendation:

Councillor Tony Carella in consultation with Mr Steven Del Duca, Chair, *Go Vote Vaughan*, recommend that Council authorize the creation of a task force to address the issue of voter participation in municipal elections in the City of Vaughan, in order to determine

(1) by means of a scientifically-rigorous poll and anecdotal reports of citizens submitted by a variety of means (including but not limited to on-line responses to a questionnaire available at the City's website) why citizens *do not* exercise their democratic right to vote;

(2) what opportunities---as suggested by experts in these matters or as demonstrated in other jurisdictions---may exist for increasing participation in municipal elections by current and future eligible voters;

(3) how such opportunities might best be realized in the context of the City of Vaughan, in order to increase voter participation in future municipal elections; such task force to be governed by the attached terms of reference and, with respect to "Panel 1" of the task force only, co-chaired by Councillor Carella and Mr. Del Duca;

(4) and further, that the costs of this initiative---as indicated immediately below---be paid from the Election Reserve.

Economic Impact:

The task force will require support from the Clerks Department, as well as funding for selected expenses: e.g., the cost of a poll of a sufficient number of citizens to ensure the accuracy of the findings; the cost of additions to the City's website (e.g., to permit on-line responses to a questionnaire inviting anecdotal reports by citizens of their views on why voter participation is less than what it might be, and what might be done to improve such turnout); and the cost of printing and distribution of hard copy versions of such questionnaires. The estimated costs of the foregoing is \$15,000.00.

Currently, monies are set aside each year after an election to cover the cost of the next election. As the term of this council will run for four years, as opposed to three, it is reasonable to assume that the annual contribution to the reserve will be substantially reduced (e.g., if the annual contribution has been \$133,333 per year---to generate a reserve of \$400,000 by end of year three, contributions of only \$100,000 will now be required, to create a reserve in the same amount). Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that the funding of this initiative from the Election Reserve will not place an undue burden on that source.

Purpose:

To renew democracy at the municipal level by increasing participation by those currently eligible to vote and by enhancing the likelihood of the active participation on the part of those citizens now aged fourteen to eighteen years of age who will be eligible to vote in the 2010 municipal election.

Background - Analysis and Options:

Despite an increase in voter turnout between the 2003 and 2006 municipal elections in Vaughan, voter participation in all elections has been generally on the decline in recent decades, and as turnout in municipal elections is generally lower compared to provincial and federal elections, the impact of such decline is compounded at the city level.

This phenomenon has been the subject of considerable academic research over recent years, with a range of explanations being offered, including the view that low voter turnout correlates to low socio-economic status---an explanation which does not account for why turnout remains low in relatively prosperous communities such as Vaughan and Oakville. Another explanation goes to the supposed impact of campaign financing practices on the public's confidence in legislative bodies (see research by Professors Robert McDermid of York University and Myer Siemiatycki of Ryerson University), cited as a reason for recent changes in related regulations at the federal level, and for proposals to that same end at the provincial level.

In any event, participation remains far from optimal. What should concern Council is the question: what can we as a Council do to renew participation in this fundamental democratic exercise in our own municipality?

This proposal contemplates a task force composed of two panels, to address two aspects of the same issue. The first panel ("Panel 1") would investigate means of increasing the participation of currently eligible voters in future elections, while the second ("Panel 2") would undertake a program for ensuring that those who come of voting age over the next four years participate in the 2010 municipal election. Hence, the attached terms of reference are in two parts, one for each panel.

The first panel would be comprised of citizens who indicate an interest in promoting voter participation; the second would be composed of youth now between the ages of fourteen and eighteen who were not eligible to vote in the November 2006 municipal election but will be eligible to do so in the 2010 election. As indicated by Minister for Democratic Renewal Marie Bountrogianni during her visit to the City of Vaughan last autumn, if youth are sufficiently engaged to participate in the first election following their attaining voting age, the probability of their continuing to vote in future elections is greatly increased.

Relationship to Vaughan Vision 2007:

This report is consistent with the priorities previously set by Council and the necessary resources have been allocated and approved.

Conclusion:

It is the obligation of Council, as representatives of the people, and thereby champions of democracy, to promote full participation in the most fundamental of democratic exercises---voting.

Attachments:

Terms of Reference: Task Force on Democratic Participation and Renewal

Report prepared by:

Councillor Tony Carella
Mr Steven Del Duca, Chair, *Go Vote Vaughan*

Respectfully submitted

Tony Carella
Councillor - Ward 2

Terms of Reference

Task Force

on

Democratic Participation & Renewal

February 12, 2007

Panel 1

**Promoting Voter Participation in
Future Elections**

WHEREAS the strength of democracy as a form of government depends on the interest of all citizens in the operation of their government; and

WHEREAS the strength of our representative form of democracy depends on the participation of citizens in the choice of their representatives via elections; and

WHEREAS participation in municipal elections is notably lower than in provincial and federal elections;

**NOW THEREFORE BE IT
RESOLVED** *that the Council of the City of Vaughan deems it advisable that this state of affairs is best addressed by the formation of the Task Force on Democratic Participation and Renewal (hereinafter 'the task force'), which task force shall be composed of two panels, the first of which (hereinafter 'Panel 1') shall address ways in which to increase participation by those presently of voting age in future municipal elections.*

Panel 2

**Promoting Participation
by Youth In Future Elections**

WHEREAS the strength of democracy as a form of government depends on the interest of all citizens in the operation of their government; and

WHEREAS the strength of our representative form of democracy depends on the participation of citizens in the choice of their representatives via elections; and

WHEREAS the promotion of interest among youth in the electoral process is one way to ensure their participation in that process

**NOW THEREFORE BE IT
RESOLVED** *that the Council of the City of Vaughan deems it advisable that this state of affairs is best addressed by the formation of the Task Force on Democratic Participation and Renewal (hereinafter 'the task force'), which task force shall be composed of two panels, the second of which (hereinafter 'Panel 2') shall address ways of fostering interest in municipal affairs among youth, including their participation in municipal elections once they have attained voting age.*

<p>Goal: The goal of Panel 1 will be a greater than 50% turnout of all eligible voters in the 2010 municipal election</p>	<p>Goal: The goal of Panel 2 will be a greater than 60% turnout by first-time voters in the 2010 municipal election</p>
<p>Objectives: The objectives of Panel 1 will be to</p> <p>(1) <i>educate</i> citizens on the impact of municipal government on their everyday lives, especially vis-à-vis other levels of government (i.e., regional, provincial, and federal); and</p> <p>(2) <i>explore</i> any and all options in respect of municipal election procedures that are or will be permitted under the current or subsequently amended version(s) of the Municipal Elections Act, which, if pursued, would reasonably be expected to increase future voter turnout, and to make recommendations in respect of the choice of such options to the Council of the City of Vaughan, for transmission to the appropriate authorities; and</p> <p>(3) <i>examine</i> any systemic mechanisms that militate against voter participation, and to propose solutions to the appropriate authorities, to limit the adverse impact of such mechanisms, thereby increasing the likelihood of improved voter turnout in future elections.</p>	<p>Objectives: The objectives of Panel 2 will be to</p> <p>(1) <i>educate</i> youth on the impact of municipal government on their everyday lives, especially vis-à-vis other levels of government (i.e., regional, provincial, and federal); and</p> <p>(2) <i>explore</i> any options in respect of municipal election procedures that are or will be permitted under the current or any subsequently amended versions(s) of the Municipal Elections Act, which, if pursued, would reasonably be expected to increase new voter turnout and to make recommendations in respect of the choice of such options to the Council of the City of Vaughan, for transmission to the appropriate authorities.</p> <p>(3) <i>encourage</i> youth to consider a career of service at the municipal level, either through elective office or in municipal administration.</p>

<p>Composition: The task force shall be composed of ten males and ten females who are legally resident in the City of Vaughan, and reasonably reflective of the racial, ethnic, religious, and socio-economic diversity of our citizens, and representative of all of the City's wards, to be nominated by a committee composed of the co-chairs of the task force based on applications received by the Clerks Department in the same manner as prescribed for non-statutory, special-purpose committees no later than sixty days after the approval of the task force by Council, subject to appointment by Council no later than 120 days after its approval of the task force.</p>	<p>Composition: The task force shall be composed of a minimum of ten and a maximum of fifteen individuals between the ages of fourteen and eighteen in 2007, who are legally resident in the City of Vaughan, and reasonably reflective of the racial, ethnic, religious and socio-economic diversity and present educational achievement (or lack thereof) of our youth, to be nominated by the Vaughan Youth Cabinet based on applications received by the Clerks Department in the same manner as prescribed for non-statutory, special-purpose committees no later than sixty days after the approval of the task force by Council, subject to appointment by Council no later than 120 days after its approval of the task force.</p>
<p>Workplan: Panel 1 shall, no later than September 30, 2007, provide to Council for its approval a work plan in furtherance of its goal and objectives , to be executed over a period commencing immediately it is approved by Council and ending no later than September 30, 2009.</p> <p><i>(This end-date will allow sufficient time to carry out any Council-related response to the work of the panel prior to the next election campaign period, commencing January 1, 2010)</i></p>	<p>Workplan: Panel 2 shall, no later than September 30, 2007, provide to Council for its approval a work plan in furtherance of its goal and objectives , to be executed over a period commencing immediately it is approved by Council and ending no later than September 30, 2009.</p> <p><i>(This end-date will allow sufficient time to carry out any Council-related response to the work of the panel prior to the next election campaign period, commencing January 1, 2010)</i></p>

<p><i>Components of Workplan:</i> The work plan developed by Panel 1 shall include a minimum of five initiatives designed to increase the participation of citizens in municipal elections.</p>	<p><i>Components of Workplan:</i> The work plan developed by Panel 2 shall include a minimum of five initiatives designed to increase the level of interest in and participation by youth in municipal affairs (particularly elections), including (by way of example only) the following kinds of initiatives: job-shadowing of Council members/senior staff, a speakers' bureau for civics classes, mentoring by Council members/senior staff, field trips to city hall, annual meet-and-greet secondary school visits by members of Council/senior staff, etc.</p>
<p><i>Outcome Measurements:</i> The work plan shall include methods for the measurement of the degree to which the objectives of this initiative are being achieved by Panel 1 over time.</p>	<p><i>Outcome Measurements:</i> The work plan shall include methods for the measurement of the degree to which the objectives of this initiative are being achieved by Panel 2 over time.</p>
<p><i>Interim Reports:</i> Reports on activities in furtherance of the objectives of this initiative shall be provided to Council by Panel 1 on a semi-annual basis (i.e., by March 31, 2008; September 30, 2008; March 31, 2009)</p>	<p><i>Interim Reports:</i> Reports on activities in furtherance of the objectives of this initiative shall be provided to Council by Panel 2 on a semi-annual basis (i.e., by March 31, 2008; September 30, 2008; March 31, 2009)</p>
<p><i>Final Report:</i> Upon completion of the initiatives included in its work plan, and not later than September 30, 2009, Panel 1 shall submit to Council a final report of its work, including measured outcomes of the various initiatives which comprised its work plan.</p>	<p><i>Final Report:</i> Upon completion of the initiatives included in its work plan, and not later than September 30, 2009, Panel 2 shall submit to Council a final report of its work, including measured outcomes of the various initiatives which comprised its work plan.</p>

<p><i>Vacancies due to resignation:</i> In the event of the resignation of any individual appointed a member of Panel 1, a qualified replacement shall be nominated by the co-chairs, preferably from among the set of original applicants, subject to the approval of Council.</p>	<p><i>Vacancies due to resignation:</i> In the event of the resignation of any individual appointed a member of Panel 2, a qualified replacement shall be nominated by the Vaughan Youth Cabinet, subject to the approval of Council.</p>
<p><i>Supplemental appointments:</i> Not applicable</p>	<p><i>Supplemental appointments:</i> The Vaughan Youth Cabinet may from time to time supplement the number of individuals originally appointed, if such original appointees number less than fifteen individuals, and provided said supplemental nominees are approved by Council.</p>
<p><i>Chair:</i> The chair (or co-chairs) of Panel 1 shall be appointed by Council and serve at its pleasure.</p>	<p><i>Chair:</i> The chair (or co-chairs) of Panel 2 shall be appointed by the Vaughan Youth Cabinet and serve at its pleasure.</p>
<p><i>Liaison Officers:</i> Subject to their respective nominations by Council and the City Manager a member of the Council of the City of Vaughan (other than the chair or co-chair of Panel 1 who is a member of Council) and a senior staff member shall act as liaison officers between the task force and Council/city staff over the term of the task force. As well, the Clerks Department will provide such administrative support to the task force as the liaison officers deem necessary and reasonable.</p>	<p><i>Liaison Officers:</i> Subject to their respective nomination by Council and the City Manager, a member of the Council of the City of Vaughan and a senior staff member shall act as liaison officers between the task force and Council/city staff over the term of Panel 2. As well, the Clerks Department will provide such administrative support to Panel 2 as the liaison officers deem necessary and reasonable.</p>

<p><i>Revisions to the Terms of Reference:</i> The terms of reference of Panel 1 shall be subject to revision by Council at any time.</p>	<p><i>Revisions to the Terms of Reference:</i> The terms of reference of Panel 2 shall be subject to revision by Council at any time.</p>
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Task Force Timeline

Action	Date
Approval of task force by Council	<i>To be determined</i>
Deadline for submission of applications to serve as task force panelists	<i>60 days following Council approval of task force</i>
Recommendations of selection committee/Youth Cabinet re panel members to Council for approval	<i>120 days following Council approval of task force</i>
Submission to Council of work plans	<i>September 30, 2007</i>
First Interim Report	<i>March 31, 2008</i>
Second Interim Report	<i>September 30, 2008</i>
Third Interim Report	<i>March 31, 2009</i>
Final Report	<i>September 30, 2009</i>
Deadline for any Council response to Final Report	<i>December 31, 2009</i>
2010 Election Campaign Period	<i>January 1, 2010 - November 8, 2010</i>