

THERE'S MORE TO THE ELECTION THAN THE LRT

As September rolls around and the summer recedes in the rear-view mirror, the public starts to focus on school, work and possibly the municipal election.

One would expect that topping the priority list among residents would be whether Hamilton should continue along the path to build the \$1-billion light rail transit system. Some people may be surprised to learn the project remains a topic of concern among a specific group of Hamiltonians, especially since the issue should have been settled in the 2014 municipal election.

There is a growing sense that a majority of Hamiltonians, especially in the suburban areas, are either against it or are indifferent to the LRT.

But the new Doug Ford administration has injected a sense of uncertainty to whether LRT - the largest public works project in the city's history - will actually be done.

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Despite the City of Hamilton's efforts, with the support of Metrolinx, to educate, inform and help residents understand and

possibly accept the benefits of LRT, there remains a large portion of people who know very little about the project, or have significant mischaracterizations of how it will impact their community.

While the media and a certain segment of Hamilton's population remain fixated on LRT and whether it is in danger of being scuttled by the municipal election, most residents care more about the immediate and direct issues impacting their lives.

Homeowners are more focused on whether their roads are properly maintained, if their parks are safe, whether a sidewalk will be constructed, whether their neighbourhoods will be a safe environment for their children as they walk to school, whether traffic congestion can be alleviated on their roads, and whether police are monitoring their streets for the perennial speeders that infect every neighbourhood in the city.

Residents want to be assured their community is better than it was four years ago. They are also insisting, just like four years ago, to have a say in local decision-making. In the 2014 and 2010 elections residents demanded better communication with their councillors and insisted the city listen to their views and, most importantly, have those views incorporated into any decision-making process. Those expectations from residents remain.

It would seem there is no one issue that will dominate this election race as the way the Red Hill Parkway did in 2003, the stadium fiasco in 2010 or LRT and transit managed to do in 2014. However, in some respects, Hamilton residents' concerns continue to be more of a priority and should be top of mind for all municipal candidates as the campaign shifts into high gear in the coming weeks.

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VISITING THE PAST WITH AN EYE TO THE FUTURE

COLUMNIST BARRY COE GOES BACK TO THE BEACH



BARRY COE
Column

I feel in love again this summer just as I did in August of 1969 when my wife, Susan, introduced me to Kincardine on Lake Huron where her family had its roots.

We had not been back very much since her mom and dad passed away. They say that people make a place and the shine of the town was not the same without them.

But ever the thinker Susan thought it might be fun to have a beach day with our grandkids and show them where great-grandma and grandpa lived and laughed.

Logistically the event resembled the D-Day land-

ings. Routes were plotted, aunts, uncles and cousins confirmed. Menus were considered, along with dietary needs and necessary clothing. Reservations were researched and off we went prepared and well versed on family folk lore.

I was 18 in the summer of 1969 when a 17-year-old Brampton girl took me to the beach in her mom's red Volkswagen. I had only been to a beach once before and the vastness of Lake Huron impressed me. Who knows why, but I felt an immediate attraction to the village. Perhaps I believed it would ingratiate me with Susan. By the time we left I was hopelessly in love, with both the town and the girl.

As the years past, so did the community's hold on me. However, watching preteen grandchildren splashing on the beach and connecting with family made me smile and reconsider.

The grandchildren had a memorable day and asked dozens of questions about their great-grandparents.

It was a rekindling of historical connections, enhancing the value of family and all that entails.

As I sat in the sand and heard the grandkids ask if we could return to the beach next year I smiled. As I often do, I doubted if we could re-enact the magic of this special family day. Somehow, I thought, I must try.

Who knows, maybe it could become an annual family ritual or renewal. And maybe one day, one of the grandkids will bring up a special friend and fall in love on the beach as I did in the summer of '69.

Time will tell.

Barry Coe is a media and PR consultant, and a member of the CHML Children's Fund Board.

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EDITORIAL

The sky won't fall if NAFTA tanks

Auto parts manufacturing is expected to take centre stage in the coming weeks as negotiators on both sides of the border work to retool NAFTA — but if those talks do fail the demise of the 23-year-old trade pact won't spell economic ruin.

As one observes what is happening at the negotiating table, it's important to remember that Canada has changed a lot since 1994.

Stephen Beatty, vice-president and corporate secretary of Toyota Canada Inc., recently met with Metroland Media for an enlightening discussion regarding trade and the Canadian auto industry.

Beatty is quick to point out that if the U.S. pulls out of NAFTA, it won't be the end of the economic world.

"No tariff in the world can hold people back from their (buying) choices," Beatty surmised.

He added that in the wake of NAFTA, any Canadian goods slapped with tariffs would remain competitive, as our dollar would be discounted in world markets to reflect tariffs.

Also, unlike in 1994, economies of scale have developed in Asia and India where huge middle classes have an big appetite for consumer goods.

Why? Because we are a trading nation and will continue to be one, even if the Trump administration pulls the plug on NAFTA.

While he doesn't predict a financial apocalypse in Canada if NAFTA is scuttled, Beatty does say that such a move will change our stature on the world stage, rather than creating the catalyst for a stock exchange collapse.

In a post-NAFTA world, North America would appear fractured to the titan countries of Russia, China and India.

To date, we are impressed with how the Trudeau government has conducted itself at the trade talks, and so is Beatty.

Canadian negotiators have kept their cool, stayed focused, and most importantly, haven't taken the bait when dealing with the constantly changing rhetoric from the Trump administration. It behooves us to be the voice of reason at the negotiating table.

After all, we're confident the sky won't fall in a post-NAFTA world, but let's hope common sense wins the day on both sides of the border.

It may not be perfect, but NAFTA has been pretty good to Canada.



Column

Internet: I feel like you don't know me

Gordon Cameron

GROUP MANAGING EDITOR



I think we all have people in our lives who only seem to know one or at most two things about us. For them, the entirety of our existence can be boiled down to the fact that they know we like baseball or remember the time that we tripped in the cafeteria while carrying a tray full of food. Our best friends they aren't, but assuming their recollections of us aren't too out of date, it can allow for a pleasant, if superficial conversation.

I think we've also had the experience of running into someone at a concert and from then on they assume that your enjoyment of Rod Stewart's music is the driving force of your life.

Of course, most of the people we interact with on a daily basis have a fuller, rounder picture of who we are. They know that while you do still like baseball, you only watch like 10 games a year. They get that while you do appreciate Rod Stewart's music, the only reason

you went was that you were given free tickets.

Now imagine a Bizarro World where everyone you came into contact with only knew the trivialities of your life. Think of how mundane your conversations would be. Can you imagine wanting to hang out in this space for long?

Welcome to the internet.

The algorithms and artificial intelligences that are dictating so much of what we see online are remarkable creations. They've found ways to collect and track our actions, from which they've tried to create a customized experience for the user. The problem is that it seems that while the system may know that you clicked on something, it has no idea why you clicked on it.

I have good friends who have a greyhound. Like many pet owners, they post a lot of photos of their dog. Because I interact with them (and even occasionally click on their photos), Facebook thinks I'm a fellow enthusiast and peppers my page with greyhound-related ads and group suggestions. I have nothing against greyhounds, but if it weren't for my friends, I wouldn't give them a second thought.

After researching a camera purchase for work, photographic equipment ads stalked

me for months wherever I went online. What the compu-mind didn't know is that the last time I actually bought a camera for personal use was back when Bob Wade was mayor.

Email is no better. I receive almost daily messages from schools where I've attended football games trying to get me to travel over 1,000 km to come support a team I may not like, play a sport that I don't care about. Travel sites are the funniest. I received one this week that tried to get me to wax nostalgic about the night I spent in a hotel in Altoona, PA on my way to a conference. The hotel was fine, and the woman at the front counter was delightful, but the memory is hardly going to stir-up my travel bug.

As the technology progresses, things will get better. I'll see fewer posts about greyhounds and more about my buddy's exciting new job. My one-off purchases won't be mistaken for burning needs. But no matter how well the new systems get to know me, there'll still be a special place in my heart for the older, clumsy, try-its-best algorithms of today.

We'll always have Altoona.

— Gordon Cameron is Group Managing Editor for Hamilton Community News.

Are you afraid of what might happen to the Canadian economy if NAFTA falls apart?
Have your say Vote online at www.hamiltonnews.com
 Last week we asked:
 Should all Hamilton police officers wear body cameras?
85% said Yes and 15% said No

EDITORIAL

Take me to your robot

Artificial intelligence hasn't replaced all of North America's jobs yet, but that doesn't mean businesses aren't trying to accelerate the process as the workplace undergoes a transformation as significant as the industrial revolution.

Last year McDonald's Canada added self-service kiosks for people hungry for its Big Macs. Tim Hortons, Burger King and Starbucks have introduced apps that allow customers to order and pay in advance on their smart phones thereby bypassing lines.

Or how about the Australian company Fastbrick Robotics that has created Hadrian X, which can lay 1,000 standard bricks in an hour. In a recent report, the World Economic Forum predicted that robotic automation will result in the net loss of more than five million jobs across 15 developed nations by 2020.

Even the simple theatre experience allows and sometimes even forces customers to buy their own tickets to see a film eliminating the need for people.

And Amazon, after purchasing Whole Foods, last year opened a check-out free grocery store in Seattle.

Businesses have always attempted to cut costs to save a buck. It seems, though, that companies are becoming more direct at reducing, even eliminating, their labour costs so they don't have to deal with human issues.

Don't be fooled by companies — think Tim Hortons — that may promote themselves as “making a true difference” for individuals and communities, boasting of helping local community initiatives. It comes with the caveat they are always searching for a way to reduce nagging labour expenses.

Raising the minimum wage is the right thing to do in a society where a large number of minimum wage earners don't earn enough to support their families and have to use the food bank to feed their children. Yet by increasing the cost of labour, companies are that much more inclined to reduce employees.

A report by the Mowat Centre found that 42 per cent Canada's labour force is at risk of being impacted by automation over the next 10 to 20 years. Another report from the Brookfield Institute for Innovation in 2016 found retail sales clerks and cashiers are among the top five jobs at risk from automation.

Raising the minimum wage in the face of companies desperate to cut costs while good public policy unfortunately will only accelerate the introduction of technology into the workforce. Governments and companies need to collaborate to develop a skilled workforce. Having a job program and a policy to implement it to meet the needs of society is the proper way for companies and government to work together for the betterment of its citizens.

SOME TIM HORTONS STORES HAVE AN ISSUE WITH THE MINIMUM WAGE HIKE!



Column

Is Johnny Manziel worth the trouble?

Gordon Cameron

GROUP MANAGING EDITOR



So it seems like Johnny Football might be coming to town after all.

While as of this writing no deal has been inked between the Ticats and Johnny Manziel, the team has at least extended him an offer in order to keep his CFL rights. The Tabbies need a quarterback and at his best Manziel is one heck of a QB.

I remember watching him play while he was at Texas A&M. He seemed to be able to escape any pressure, shake any tackle and run and throw his way to first downs and touchdowns seemingly at will. Any football fan could see that he was quite the special talent.

However, even then there were concerns about his off-field behaviour. He was charged for his role in a fight and for giving cops a fake ID. He threw a water bottle at a persistent autograph seeker. He was charged with domestic violence after a 2016 incident involving

his then girlfriend. (Those charges were later dropped after Manziel completed an anger management course.) He also has a well-documented reputation for liking to party and has done a stint in a rehab clinic.

Is that really the face you want for Hamilton's marquee sports franchise?

For some, the answer is a hard no. Given the nature of his past actions (and in light of the Art Briles fiasco) some accuse the team of putting success on the field ahead of doing what's right. Others will give the opposite response, arguing that he's paid his debt and deserves another chance to help a squad in desperate need of a signal-caller.

Manziel has had second and third chances before, so there's no guarantee that this time he'll finally behave. Then again, perhaps he needed all those missteps to finally mature enough to start making good life decisions.

There is no way to see into his soul and project with 100 per cent certainty which way he'd go. No matter what the Ticats ultimately decide to do they'll be taking a big risk that could end-up damaging the team's brand or its on-field performance.

I do like to believe that people can change

and that who we are isn't solely defined by the worst things we've ever done. But not every story has a happy ending. Not every sin is easily forgivable.

Deciding what to do about Manziel is an existential choice for the team. If he keeps his nose clean and performs on the field, then management looks like compassionate geniuses for believing in a player when no one else would. If he hasn't changed and also plays like he did in Cleveland, then it could create a rupture between the team and the community that will take decades to heal.

At their best, sports teams represent the cities that they call home. They act as ambassadors for the community and a source of civic pride. Even when they're losing, sports teams can bring a city together through a sense of shared misery.

However, when teams bring true shame to their hometowns, it casts a pall not just over the local residents, but their city's reputation the world over.

Make this decision carefully Ticats. There's a lot riding on it.

— Gordon Cameron is Group Managing Editor for Hamilton Community News.

Should the pace of automation be slowed down to protect jobs?
Have your say Vote online at www.hamiltonnews.com

Last week we asked:

Should this fall's municipal election be the final word on the LRT project?

71% said Yes and **29%** said No