

Editorial

Petrolia needs facts to make decisions

Facts are a wonderful thing. They are useful in making decisions. And often, they are lacking when Petrolia politicians make decisions.

There have been two very blatant cases in the last few months. First, the town's \$9.2 million to rejuvenate Victoria Hall. In July 2018, a consultant specializing in theater redevelopments talked to a handful of key theater people and came back to council saying the theater should take over Victoria Hall and it should include a massive addition. Town Hall, the consultant said, should find another home.

The move was widely criticized by the public and politicians distanced themselves from the idea during the 2018 election.

But, here we are again with a plan to move the council chambers out of Victoria Hall so the theater can have more room. Granted some of that room is to make the building accessible, but most of the plans focus on expanding space for theater patrons.

Staff presented a three-page report, with a written description of a renovated Victoria Hall - no drawings or detailed plan - and suggested the municipality apply for grants for the project. There was no discussion if the full administrative renovation plan was needed, where the costing came from or even how much money the town's taxpayers would contribute. It was given the okay and the grant forms were submitted.

Similarly, a local developer went to council looking to pay to cut down a 25-acre woodlot instead of replanting. It's allowable by county rules, however, no information was given about whether the area is going to be clear cut, if some trees will remain, what that will do to the local environment. The information isn't there because - according to county officials - those environmental impact reports aren't even done yet.

How does this council make decisions without facts?

One of two things is happening; either the councillors don't bother to dig deeply, trusting that staff is always right or they're talking about the issues in private instead of open council.

Either way - it's not good decision making.

Letters to the Editor

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Our Story



FROM THE LAMBTON COUNTY ARCHIVES

A turn of the century photo of bridge construction in the southern part of Brooke Township. This photo hangs in the council chambers in Brooke-Alvinston.

In the face of cruel dementia; faith prevails

I cried the day my mom told me dad forgot how to put his tie on.

It was silly I suppose. I had known for some time he had dementia and that he would begin to forget the everyday things of life. In fact, he'd been losing little bits of information for several years by then.

But the thought of him forgetting something that is so core to him, putting on his tie to go to church Sunday morning - that was unexpectedly hard.

But really, it all has been unexpectedly hard. Dementia is a cruel disease. You watch as the people you love are slowly stolen away from you.

Dad, after trying to put together a barbeque about two years ago, said his mind just didn't work the way he wanted it to.

He knew then what was happening and I often wonder how hard that was for him - knowing what was coming

but being unable to stop it.

I know it must of weighed on him. He railed against the cognitive testing his doctors wanted which maps his decline. Mom would be frustrated that he wouldn't cooperate but I understood. Who, after all, would want to know how quickly you are losing the core of your being?

And while dementia is cruel, there are also moments where the sun breaks through the clouds. When I go to see him, his face lights up with instant recognition and his all encompassing hugs are still the best.

Even things that show his decline bring out who he is. Dad has lost all sense of time. In his mind, it is almost always Sunday. He wakes up - either at 3 am, 5 am or 7 am - and digs in his closet to find his suit. He often comes to the breakfast table ready to go to church, only to be told it isn't Sunday.

With all he has lost, he still wants to be

in church. It's not surprising really; his faith - his love of the Lord - is the core of him.

Some of my best memories are of sitting beside dad in church as he sang, louder than anyone else in the pews around us, smiling as he did.

Singing still gives him great joy and those familiar songs he still sings with gusto. Dad is taking a book of hymns to the nursing home today, one of the few things that will be familiar. I'm glad he has that comfort because dementia is a cruel disease.



Heather Wright



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Publications Mail Registration No. 42663514

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Editorial

Democracy is a wonderful thing

As Canadians, every four years we vote for our federal, provincial and municipal leaders. It is an open process. While your vote is secret, the debates, the discussion about policy and politics, the dissection of who has the moral character to lead, all takes place in the public forum.

But that all seems to change when it is time to fill a vacancy on municipal council.

Take the recent actions in Plympton-Wyoming for example. Last Wednesday, behind closed doors, council appointed Mike Vasey to fill the vacancy left by the death of Ron Schenk.

In our reading of the agendas from the municipality, the only hint that council was dealing with the issue on June 24 was under the Closed Meeting Session part of the agenda which reads "Item A - Personal Matters Section 239 (2) (b) - Personal matters about an identifiable individual, including municipal or local board employees.

Of course, that's not much of a hint considering all of the agendas from June - including two meetings which had no public business at all, just a closed session - had the exact same declaration. Could it have been about filling the vacancy on council? Was it about the ongoing personnel issues at the fire department? Was it about an issue with a staff member? We don't know.

And most people would not think this would be about a political appointment since politicians are not staff of the municipality.

While it would be nice if all municipalities spelled out what they were talking about in closed session - we would argue the appointment of a municipal councillor should never be done behind closed doors. And it certainly should be done a whole lot differently than Plympton-Wyoming did it this time around.

Under the Municipal Act, there really are no rules to proceed by. Councils can choose someone or have an election. Traditionally, councils choose not to spend a lot of money on a by-election and appoint someone who has already run.

But, should council not clearly have stated before an appointment was made that they were going to make a decision and what criteria they were going to base it on?

We believe council should step in where the province has left a void and set its own vacancy policy. If there is a vacant seat, it should be filled by the candidate for the position who just missed the cut during the last election. If they don't want to serve, the next person is given the job. Only if all the candidates say no would there be an election. No discussion needed.

Then, choosing a new councillor would be a simple process and wouldn't have to be done behind closed doors.

Our gut feeling is this went to an in camera meeting because council was talking about the people they were going to choose. Councillors shouldn't be talking about personalities or who would be the best fit for the job. Voters already did that. It's called an election.

Our Story



Long before there were settlers, Wilkesport was mostly inaccessible for land travel due to a large amount of forestry and wildlife. Aboriginal peoples hunted and fished in the area along the river but moved inland in the colder seasons. The first settlers to arrive were Paul Sturdevant and Heiram Sails in 1830 and were involved in logging, shipping and agriculture. As they arrived, the aboriginal people taught them how to live off the land. They also used the water ways for transportation in and out of the village before the roads were built. In 1840 John Aston Wilkes traveled from Brantford and started a saw mill. This mill made the new found settlement a place of business. The Wilkes family was also involved in limber and shipping. With the Wilkes' business booming, people called the settlement 'Wilkes Mills' then 'Wilkesburg'. Eventually, as then Wilkesburg became the only inland port in Lambton County its name soon became 'Wilkesport'.

Watching the world go by from the front porch

I'm a big believer in the idea that you can understand our world by sitting on your front porch and watching people go by.

I've had more time to do that than normal because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since the weather became warmer, my family sits out on the porch most nights for dinner. As we juggle our plates and utensils on our lap, we watch as the cars and our neighbours go by before us.

We've done this for years. This year is different.

In the last few years, traffic was the sound track for our meals. Often dinner would be punctuated by someone throwing up their hands and yelling 'Hey, slow down' as some teenager in dad's car blew by the porch.

Until last week, when the reconstruc-

tion of a nearby street diverted traffic in front of our house, there were a lot fewer cars. It was more likely to hear the bark of a dog or a dog owner urging some old pup to get moving and do their business, then to yell at a speeder.

Today, we watch as family members walk side-by-side past our supper table. Some we see almost every night. There are friends, some walking six feet apart, others not. There are dads with kids on bikes or pushing strollers. People are moving. And they are together talking.

After a long cold spring of uncertainty, people want to be doing something with people they love.

As a society we put a lot of value on organized things - sports, choirs, theatre, more sports - but there is value too, in the doing of things unorganized.

A leisurely walk with a daughter can be great not just for the body but for the soul in times when our kids and - let's face it most of the adults - are questioning what has happened to the world.

While we all miss "normal" we shouldn't be afraid to embrace this time of abnormal.

We can reconnect during it. We can grow from its lessons.

We can learn from it, even from watching the world go by from your front porch.



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Publications Mail Registration No. 42663514

Proud host of the Local Journalism Initiative

Funded by the Government of Canada
Financé par le gouvernement du Canada

Canada

Editorial

The Act of Remembrance

As is our tradition, *The Independent* uses its editorial space to mark Remembrance Day.

This is John McCrae's famous poem, In Flanders Fields. He was inspired to write it May 3, 1915 after the funeral of one of his friends who died in the Second Battle of Ypres. According to legend, other soldiers retrieved McCrae's poem after the poet threw it out because he was not satisfied with his work.

Today it is one of the best known pieces of poetry in Canada.

In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.

...

*They shall grow not old,
as we that are left grow old;
Age shall not weary them,
nor the years condemn.
We will remember them
We will remember them*



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Our Story



FROM THE DAVE BURWELL POSTCARD COLLECTION

This lovely undated Pesha Photo is of the Courtright Train Station, which also included a customs office.

Ode to my faithful traveling companion the Equinox

I know a lot of people who name their cars. I have always thought that was a strange practice - a car is an object, not a being that needs a name.

However I can understand the attachment we form to our various forms of travel.

I can tell you about my very first ride - a snazzy blue bicycle with ape hanger handle bars and a blue banana seat. It was a great set of wheels.

I can also tell you about my first car - a 1980 Chevy Chevette. It was a standard, which I loved. It took me to college in London every day. When it needed a paint job, my brother, who was going to be an autobody mechanic, painted it refrigerator white. One day, in a fit of frustration over a newscaster who pronounced a name wrong, I angrily twisted the dial a little to hard and it flew out the window, making it impossible to find another station, since the push button selectors didn't work.

You would think as the novelty of having a car wore off, your memories of them would not be a strong, but I

could spend at least an hour rhyming off the different modes of transport I've had over the years to the point where I would drive you up the wall. But they're all part of my personal history.

This week, I took another turn in that personal journey; my faithful traveling companion for the last five years - the Equinox - has been retired. It was still running - 464,364 kilometers later - but it was tired.

About mid-October, the red beast started making a lot of noise when I hit the pot holes. The fact there was noise was not unusual; I was used to those other noises. It was the type of noise that made me put on the brakes - a grinding and shifting which made me wonder what was really going on down there. I dared not look.

Instead, I went in search of a replacement. I found one, for more money than I really wanted to spend. Then, before it arrived, a friend suggested that maybe the Equinox only had a small problem and shouldn't be put out to pasture yet. I felt guilty. This was

the car that got me across the county, the province and even the country without a speck of problems and yet I was willing to toss it aside so easily. But the deed was done.

As it turned out, I need not have felt guilty. The mechanic was wary of me driving the Equinox back home - I had to promise it would be going directly to the junk yard. And it will. After I have a chance to clean out all the receipts and wrappers crammed into every nook and cranny and likely a few reminders of countless trips to the beach, cottage and school.

It won't be an easy journey to the scrap yard but I can honestly say my faithful traveling companion has earned its rest.



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CANADIAN
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