

REPORT OF THE MUNICIPAL COMMITTEE

TO BE CIRCULATED TO THE SSCA BOARD AT THE AUGUST MEETING

BY PENNY PEPPERELL

AUGUST 8, 2011

Bert Liverance asked Penny Pepperell to chair an ad hoc committee to look at how the SSCA should handle the endorsement of candidates in municipal elections and related issues. The November 3, 2010 terms of reference were approved at a meeting of the SSCA board members, with a report expected by the summer of 2011. The members of the committee are Penny Pepperell and Bill McNeill, both past presidents, Chris Goulding, current board member and Jeff Clarke and John Honderich members at large.

IN BRIEF

1. The Committee recommends that the Association continue to endorse candidates for municipal office.
2. The board should make a concerted and public effort to encourage people who may be thinking of running to come forward and discuss their candidacy with a view to gaining the Association's endorsement.
3. Nonetheless, the board should hold all-candidates meetings and otherwise provide the means by which all the candidates can address the members of the Association.

SHOULD THE ASSOCIATION ENDORSE CANDIDATES?

The Municipal Committee agrees that the SSCA should source out and endorse candidates for municipal office—the reeve, councillors and members of the board of education—and that the Association should not endorse candidates for provincial or federal office.

The SSCA is a genuine ratepayers group that has always engaged in municipal affairs and is by far the largest association in Ward Four, and second largest in The Archipelago. In its scope and political influence, it is unlike any of the much smaller neighbourhood organizations that do not endorse candidates.

SSCA members expect the SSCA board to monitor the whole gamut of political, environmental, legal and planning issues, keep up to date on proposed legal changes, monitor the activities of Council and generally look out for the interests of the ratepayers. While the interests of all members are not necessarily the same, the Committee is of the opinion that the SSCA is seen as the principal protector of its collective interests.

Just as important as endorsing candidates for office, is sourcing them out in a transparent process that the members would agree is fair and open-minded.

THE SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP

The SSCA enjoys a very close relationship with its Ward Four councillors. The fact that two of the three attend, report to and participate in all the board's meetings has bound the

affairs of the Township and the Association very closely, and has ensured that the SSCA board members are extremely well informed about the goings on at Council.

This is by no means standard procedure. In contrast, Pointe au Baril invites its councillors to sit in on a part of one meeting a year. Many neighbourhood associations hear from their councilors on an even less frequent basis.

This special relationship between the SSCA and its councillors is a function of the fact that our elected officials are very often (but not exclusively i.e. Rick Zanussi, Peter Eanhorn) former members of the SSCA board and as such, are entitled to attend as members of the advisory board.

THE SSCA HAS ALWAYS BEEN A POLITICAL BODY

There are historical reasons as well. The Association played an important role in the establishment of the Township. The late John Wilson's excellent paper, "The Georgian Bay Archipelago Election: A preliminary Report" describes how aggressively the local associations, lead by the SSCA but under the aegis of the GBA, pursued the idea of establishing their own water-based township when Parry Sound threatened to annex the islands. **The Committee suggests that board members read this document.**

Elections have been few, resulting in Ward Four councillors often being elected by acclamation. The scarcity of elections can be attributed to the scarcity of controversial issues, which in turn can be seen as a function of the mutually reinforcing relationship between the Association and its councillors.

The SSCA recruits potential candidates for office under the rubric of succession planning. If the SSCA were not to do this, what organization has the vetting process and communication tools necessary to speak to and for constituents? Where strong, creditable grassroots organizations don't exist, constituents can be easily manipulated to support candidates with nefarious agendas (such as unsuitable development.)

THE SSCA'S POWER CAN BE SEEN AS A CAUSE OF RESENTMENT

The SSCA exercises very persuasive powers in Ward Four elections. SSCA candidates invariably win. And when you consider that the candidates that the SSCA supports have frequently been former board members and presidents, the circle of power and influence is even smaller. Obviously, this situation can cause resentment among those who aren't members of the association, the board or among its former presidents. **Therefore the Board should take special care in its deliberations to seek out worthy and well-informed candidates who may not necessarily have this background.**

THE BOARD'S RESPONSIBILITY TO SOURCE POTENTIAL CANDIDATES FROM THE OUTSIDE

The SSCA has a dual and somewhat conflicting responsibility to provide a level playing field on which all the candidates standing for office can make their positions known to the membership. This is consistent with its mandate as a ratepayers group, both because, if the selection process is transparent and deliberate (as opposed to perfunctory) the likelihood is greater of choosing the best person, but also because such a process is fairer. **Generally speaking, the Board should encourage its members to engage in the political process.**

When an election is called, the SSCA should interview all those who are running for office and encourage all those who might be considering doing so, to come forward and be interviewed by the board with a view to gaining its endorsement. The board should be mindful of the tension between supporting its own in-house candidates and being open to outsiders who may be excellent well-rounded candidates., Most importantly, it is not necessary for the board to endorse all three Ward Four candidates.

Sourcing candidates for possible endorsement is a difficult and touchy job. The board should develop some criteria for selection and then scrupulously follow through with it, recognizing that their choices may make some people unhappy.

In cases where the incumbents are choosing not to run again, the SSCA could organize information sessions for people considering running for council at which the sitting councilors could outline their experiences and suss out who among the attendees seems most suitable.

The SSCA board should hold all-candidates meetings and distribute the sort of information package that was emailed to the membership prior to the last election*.

In the interests of fairness, the board would be wise to hold off endorsing its candidates until *after* the all-candidates meeting.

The authority and the responsibility for deciding whom the SSCA should endorse rests with its board. The Ward Four Committee provides an opportunity for all the associations to decide whether or not they can agree to back the same candidates. Sometimes they do and sometimes they don't find agreement. It is a fairly informal process that shouldn't distract from the responsibilities of the SSCA board to its members.

When the Ward Four Committee has reached a consensus, then elections have often been avoided. (Interestingly though, despite the deliberations of this committee, Ward Four hasn't had fewer elections than other wards.) Avoiding elections saves aggravation and money and may seem particularly desirable given the fact that elections are difficult to run where the majority of constituents are part-time residents and there is a paucity of communication vehicles to cover campaigns.

However, elections-by-acclamation can also encourage disengagement on the part of the electorate: not good in a democracy. **Therefore, even where there is no contest, holding special municipal meetings for the membership to meet the candidates**

would aid in the political education of the electorate.

* In the 2010 election, the board asked all the candidates to provide their answers to the following questions: What is the biggest problem or problems facing the Township of the Archipelago; what do you hope to accomplish in the upcoming term of office; and what experiences have you or would you hope to bring to the council? Rather than stipulating a word limit in any particular answer, there was a total word limit on their written response.