

OPEN UP MEETINGS

Hamilton's governance structure has always had a systemic secrecy problem.

Politicians and decision makers trumpet their support of transparency requirements to keep them better informed, until they decide that the public's right to know needs to be curtailed for the so-called "betterment of the community."

Egregious examples abound, including the public outcry when it was learned in 2019 councillors decided — in private, of course — not to disclose a report about the 24 billion litres of sewage and stormwater runoff that had spilled into Chedoke Creek over four years. The reason? Councillors said at the time public disclosure could harm the city's ability to defend itself from major fines.

Because of Hamilton's poor transparency records, the city clerk's office has been reviewing its open meetings policy and decided that all BIA board of director meetings will be required to be open to the public and live-streamed.

While the city's BIAs are not a hotbed of secrecy attempting to prevent the public from knowing when they will be installing their Easter or Christmas decorations in their respective downtowns, it is vital that these boards are open to the public.

No surprise, several BIA representatives had concerns. The usual arguments included committee members will be restrained on what they want to say, and there are some issues that can't be discussed in public.

The BIA representatives actually sounded like councillors hemming and hawing about how to keep the public from attending or listening to one of their own meetings.

The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the critical need to have transparency from all forms of government. These governance gatekeepers had been willing to continue with their archaic in-person meetings regardless of the transformation that technology has created. But the public and the rules governing our representatives demanded our governance structure provide transparency in the form of virtual meetings, a once-futuristic mode of communication that has now become commonplace.

The Canadian Urban Institute's City Watch project found at least 10 of the largest 65 cities in Canada cancelled council meetings altogether in the early days of the pandemic. Mayors bypassed standard protocols and instead made some decisions — whether for good or ill — unilaterally, with minimal council consultation, if any at all.

While virtual attendance should be conducted as a convenience and not to replace in-person events, having it as an option is a recognition that transparency is an essential element of any decision-making protocol. It is the fabric of a democracy to provide the essential trust for the people that they are part of the governing structure.

While the requirement that BIAs are required to hold virtual meetings as well as allow the public to sit in on their gatherings should be mandatory, the larger issue is requiring all governance structures to keep meetings open, accessible and viable for the public in a post-pandemic era.

It's the least the public should expect from its political representatives.

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LETTERS & COMMENTARY

DOG POOP SCOOP ALTERNATIVE

Ah, spring is near and along with it come the joys of walking the Rail Trail. But oops ... it's poops, step carefully.

Dog owners, (I have two), please respect foot traffic on the multi-use trail.

If your pooch poops, and you are eco-minded and do not want to use a plastic bag to scoop, here is a trick. All it takes is a flick of a stick to shoot your dog's logs onto the side of the trail, off the main grassy shoulders, where dogs and people often tread.

If you can't flick it, place some leaves on their puddle, out of courtesy for others.

It's easy, it's eco-friendly and everyone will feel good about walking the trail. Looking up at the sky and trees beats encountering the landmines below their

feet.

MARIANNA KINGSMILL,
DUNDAS

GOOD ROADS OR BIKE LANES?

Re: More efficient pothole fix, March 24

I would like to commend Nigel DeBoer for his letter. He is bang on with the idea of shave and pave. The potholes on my road were filled about one month ago and right now there is not any sign of cold patch or hot mix to be found.

A waste of a lot of time and a lot of money. I think Nigel's idea would be much more cost efficient.

I might add here that Nigel is 15! Having said that, I also just read in the Mountain News that the city is to roll out new bike lane projects for 2022, and has budgeted \$5.4 million.

So what do you think, more new bike lanes or fix up some very sad, pothole-

filled side streets?

BILL HUMPHREY,
HAMILTON MOUNTAIN

WILL EVERYONE PAY THE SAME?

I recently read that, once again, Hamilton is considering dropping the area rating system of taxes based on services, for an "everyone pays the same" rating system.

If implemented, that means that those of us in the rural areas will finally see reduced tax bills, since amalgamation, and finally get city water, city sewers, city street lights, city sidewalks, 24-hour manned fire halls, increased police patrols, cheap city electricity, plus other stuff "urbanites" have. At the same time, urban areas will see huge increases in their taxes, to pay for all those services and more. Sounds fair to me.

JAY MILLER,
GREENSVILLE

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