

*Clarington
Opinion
Panel*



**Clarington Opinion Panel 2009
Topic # 1 – Voter Turnout in Municipal Elections
November 2009**

Produced by:



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Table of Contents

1.0 Background	2
2.0 Survey Description	2
3.0 Survey Distribution & Response Rate	3
4.0 Survey Results	4
Question 1 –	4
Question 2 –	5
Question 3 & 4	8
Question 5 –	11
5.0 Concluding Remarks	12
Appendix I – Verbatim Comments	13

1.0 Background

The Clarington Opinion Panel is a monthly public service provided (free of charge) by Collis & Reed Research to help encourage discussion and discourse on issues that directly affect Clarington residents. Each month Collis & Reed will introduce a discussion topic, create and distribute a brief survey to solicit opinions and ideas from panel members and in the process encourage further to discussion and engagement on these topics.

November's topic was to ask: "*Why do so many people choose not to vote in municipal elections.*"

It was noted that Municipal government often has the most direct impact of any elected body on our quality of life. The decisions made at Town Hall affect important services like fire, police and ambulance and play a vast role in the planning and creation of parks, recreational facilities, shopping centres and even employment areas in and around our neighbourhoods. A significant portion of the property taxes that we all pay are determined by municipal government.

Despite the immediate and direct impact that local politicians have on us and our communities, voter turnout for Municipal Elections is remarkably low. In the last Clarington Municipal Election 6 out of 10 ten people did not vote. We wanted to know resident's thoughts and opinions as to why so many people choose not to vote in Clarington's Municipal Elections.

2.0 Survey Description

This survey was developed by Collis & Reed Research to provide a snapshot of the general sense of the thoughts and opinions of Clarington residents concerning low voter turnout in Clarington's municipal elections. The objective of the survey was to ask respondents to identify what they thought were the most significant factors inhibiting voter turnout and to offer comments and suggestions on how to contend with the situation. A further objective was to gather together this data and distribute results to the Clarington Opinion Panel with the hope of inciting and stimulating discussion and debate within the community on how to improve voter turnout in future elections.

The survey was comprised of five questions designed to encourage participants to consider various reasons why people choose not to vote in municipal elections. The first question asked why respondents thought most people do not vote in municipal elections. Participating panel members were given a range of possible reasons to select from and were asked to choose what they perceived to be the top two reasons. The second question asked: "*What needs to happen to improve participation in municipal elections?*" This was an open-ended question that encouraged panel members to suggest their solutions to resolve this issue. Question three focused on the panel members' personal experiences asking about their biggest concern regarding municipal politics. Respondents could choose from a list of options or they could specify their own concern. In addition participants were asked to indicate how serious of an issue this concern was to them. Finally, panel members were asked to provide additional thoughts on the issue of low voter turnout during municipal elections.

3.0 Survey Distribution & Response Rate

People from past Collis & Reed Research public on line surveys were invited to join the new Clarington Opinion Panel and were asked to encourage friends and family who might also be interested to visit panel signup site. Residents who wanted to participate registered on the website (www.collis-reed.com/signup) In addition, Clarington This Week carried a newspaper story that described the panel and the November topic. It also encouraged interested residents to join the panel. Topic 1 was sent to panel members via email on November 17th, 2009. The email included a link to the survey website and included the following text:

Topic # 1 November 2009- "Why do so many people not vote in Municipal Elections?"

Greetings from Collis & Reed Research,

Welcome to the first survey of the Clarington Opinion Panel. This month we have decided to focus on the topic of voter turnout in municipal elections.

Municipal government often has the most direct impact of any elected body on our quality of life. The decisions made at Town Hall affect important services like fire, police and ambulance and play a vast role in the planning and creation of parks, recreational facilities, shopping centres and even employment areas in and around our neighbourhoods. A significant portion of the property taxes that we all pay are determined by municipal government.

Despite the immediate and direct impact that local politicians have on us and our communities, voter turnout for municipal elections is remarkably low. In the last Clarington Municipal Election 6 out of 10 ten people did not vote.

We are curious why. We would like to know your thoughts and opinions on why so many people chose not to vote in previous Clarington Municipal Elections.

Please click on the link below to access the survey.

(Link Provided)

Your opinions on this matter will help shed some light on why voter turnout is low in Clarington and provide an opportunity for you to offer suggestions on how this phenomenon may be improved.

Please remember that all survey responses are anonymous.

As a thank you for your participation we will be offering monthly draw prizes for panel members. This month we are pleased to offer a draw for a \$100.00 gift certificate for Chanterelle Bistro in Bowmanville. Once you have submitted your response you may enter your name and email address to enter into the draw.

The survey will close at 5pm Friday, November 27th.

Your participation is greatly appreciated. The results will be posted on our webpage and on Facebook where you can make comments and suggestions for future surveys.

If you know of family, friends or colleagues who would be interested in participating in the panel please forward them the signup link below:

www.collis-reed.com/signup

To be removed from the panel please email me, Jesse, Subject: "Please Remove From Clarington Opinion Panel"

Thank you,

Reminder emails were distributed on November 23rd 2009 and November 26th 2009. Three hundred and fifty-eight panel members received the request to participate in the survey. In total 156 panel members took part in the survey a 44% response rate.

4.0 Survey Results

Question 1

Here is how question one appeared in the survey:

1. Why do you think **MOST PEOPLE** do not vote in Clarington Municipal Elections

The Most Likely Reason	Second Most Likely Reason	
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	People do not think municipal politics really matter.
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	People believe that all politicians are the same, so it does not really matter if people vote or not.
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	People are not familiar enough with municipal issues to make an informed decision.
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	People are turned off by the nastiness and negativity of election campaigns.
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	People believe that politicians do not take their opinion into consideration.
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Peoples' lives are just too busy to care about politics.
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Clarington's municipal government has traditionally done an effective job and as such voter complacency has set in.
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Other (Please specify) <input type="text"/>

When respondents chose an option as “The Most Likely Reason” that item received 2 points. When respondents then chose an item as “Second Most Likely Reason” that item received 1 point. The ranking system produced the following analysis:

	Overall Points	1 st Choice	2 nd Choice	Total Responses
People believe that all politicians are the same, so it does not really matter if people vote or not.	97	38%	21%	59
People are not familiar enough with municipal issues to make an informed decision.	92	30%	32%	62
People believe that politicians do not take their opinion into consideration.	74	24%	26%	50
Peoples' lives are just too busy to care about politics.	65	21%	23%	44
People do not think municipal politics really matter.	61	23%	15%	38
Clarington's municipal government has traditionally done an effective job and as such voter complacency has set in.	29	5%	19%	24
People are turned off by the nastiness and negativity of election campaigns.	17	5%	7%	12
OTHER ¹ : There is a general public apathy/disinterest when it comes to political issues	13	5%	3%	8
OTHER ¹ : There is a disappointment with the quality of people who to run for political office	7	3%	1%	4

¹ It is also important to note that of the responses submitted as “Other”, some fell into two discernable thematic categories: 1) a general apathy has instilled into the population, and 2) a general disappointment with the quality of people who run for political office. Twelve people selected “Other” and fit this criteria as a response and it is the resulting comments from those responses that generated the two additional themes (i.e. public apathy and disappointment with those who run for political office).

Question 2

Question 2 of this survey was an open-ended question that allowed respondents to comment on the following question: “*What do you think should happen to improve participation in municipal elections?*”

This question generated 114 comments, all of which expressed a variety of themes and suggestions and were, on average, approximately 30 words each in length. As such, we will include the Verbatim Comments for this question in the Appendix of the report. It is our intent to compile a more in-depth thematic analysis as a supplement to this report in the future. An overview of the themes contained in the comments has been created below.

Briefly:

Total Comments: 114

Average Comment Length: 30 Words

73% of respondents made a comment to this question

Themes emerging from the comments

Theme - Educate the public:

- Greater emphasis on the importance of educating students on the role of the various levels of government, especially the municipal level.

Comment Examples:

- *Attempting to reach the younger population. ie. those of voting age that leave the political "stuff" up to us older folks.*
 - *More education early on (elementary and secondary school) of the importance of voting.*
 - *Inspire and engage high school students to become more active in the process - hold candidate rallies during lunch recess - the students' interest will in-turn inspire their parents to pay attention to the issues and the candidates.*
- Ongoing media campaigns to clearly explain what municipal politicians do and the implications of people not exercising their demographic rights.

Comment Examples:

- *Better education of the electorate on the importance of municipal issues to their daily lives*
- *More useful information about municipal issues relevant to most people could be conveyed to voters, by a number of methods e.g. media, politicians themselves, factual and timely (non-self promoting) municipal newsletters etc.*
- *The public is not aware of what municipal politicians actually do for the community*

Theme - During elections:

- Increase media exposure during campaigns.
- More public events with the candidates.
- Clearly articulate the position of the candidates
- Include referendums on the ballot.
- Make it mandatory to vote.

Comment Examples:

- *Increased communication through local media outlets and greater access to elected municipal officials.*
- *More effective campaigning to bring the candidates' views on local issues to the public and create more public interest in municipal elections.*
- *Put a referendum question (or 2) on the ballot. That has been shown in other jurisdictions to raise interest and awareness and get people out to vote if it is an issue they care about, that affects them or their children directly.*
- *Make it a true civic duty by making voting mandatory. Make it easier for people to vote. I bet we will have a better turn out next election with electronic voting in place.*

Theme - Continued awareness of issues between campaigns:

- More forums to discuss issues

Comment Examples:

- *The current mayor/council has appeared to have limited who, what & how citizens can address council. If people cannot express their point of view to elected officials in a public forum than the council/mayor is perceived as having no interest in opinions.*
- Willingness of politicians to engage the public in discussion.
- Town Hall input rules be relaxed to not intimidate residents when expressing views.
- Politicians demonstrate that they are taking residents opinions into consideration.
- Organize council meetings such that general public can more easily understand what is going on.

Comment Examples:

- *Formal presentation at council meetings is very intimidating for most citizens. Perhaps townhalls in communities? The media also needs to be engaged in local politics.*
- Greater public exposure in the media between elections.

Comment Examples

- *Increased communication through local media outlets and greater access to elected municipal officials.*

Theme - Making it more convenient to vote

- Mail in ballots.
- Internet voting.
- Extended hours and locations of polling stations.

Comment Examples:

- *Voting hours..morning polls open to late.*
- *On line voting (now happening!)*

Verbatim comments are presented in Appendix I

Question 3 and Question 4

Here is how Question 3 and 4 appeared in the survey:

3. What is **YOUR** biggest concern about municipal politics?

<input type="radio"/>	Politicians are not dealing with issues that are important.
<input type="radio"/>	Politicians lack an understanding of the issues they must address.
<input type="radio"/>	A forum to learn about and discuss municipal issues in an open and forthcoming manner does not exist.
<input type="radio"/>	There are limited ways to express opinions to municipal political leaders.
<input type="radio"/>	Politicians do not appear to take my opinions into consideration.
<input type="radio"/>	Other (Please specify) <input type="text"/>

4. In your opinion, how serious of a problem is the issue that you selected in **Question 3**?

Not Serious at All	Somewhat Serious	Serious	Extremely Serious
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Question 3 asked respondents: “What is **YOUR** biggest concern about municipal politics?” The table below combines the frequency of responses to Q3 with the percentages of Q4, which asked: “In your opinion, how serious of a problem is the issue that you selected in Question 3?”

Note: The Overall Responses column is the frequency of people who selected that issue as a first choice.

	Overall Responses	Not Serious	Somewhat Serious	Serious	Extremely Serious
A forum to learn about and discuss municipal issues in an open and forthcoming manner does not exist.	41	0%	17%	54%	24%
Politicians do not appear to take my opinions into consideration.	34	3%	12%	44%	41%
There are limited ways to express opinions to municipal political leaders.	27	0%	56%	37%	7%
Politicians lack an understanding of the issues they must address.	20	5%	15%	40%	40%
OTHER: The political system is not working properly	14	0%	0%	43%	57%
Politicians are not dealing with issues that are important.	7	0%	14%	71%	14%
OTHER:	7	0%	0%	43%	57%
Overall	150 ²	1%	20%	46%	33%

² 6 respondents choose not to respond to the questions.

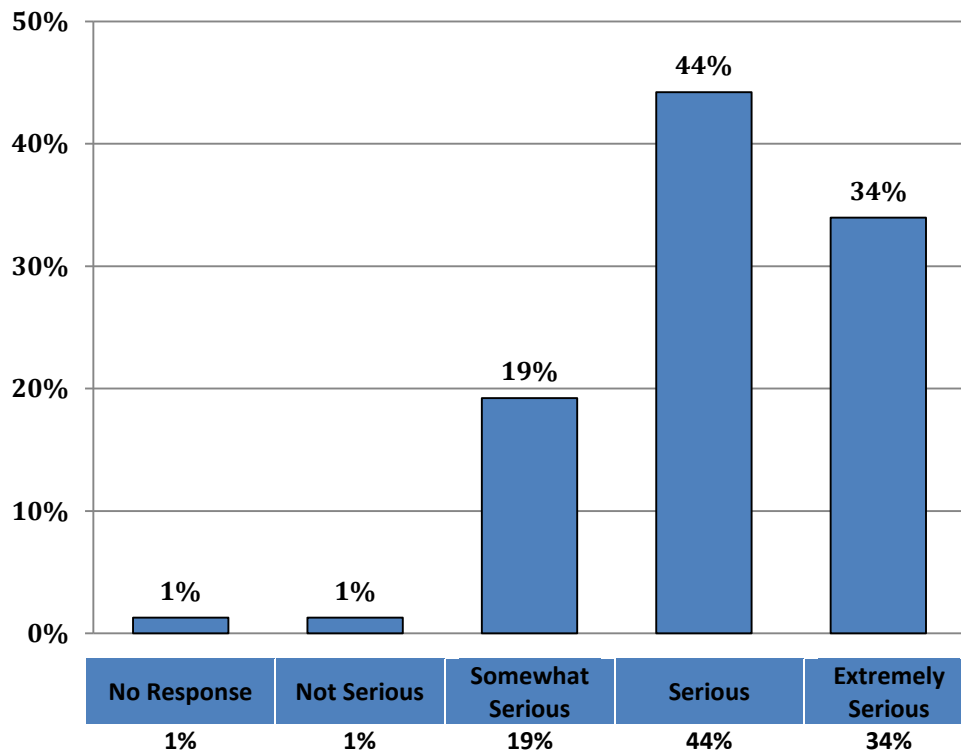
It is interesting to note that although the most common answer to question 3 was; *“A forum to learn about and discuss...does not exist”*, respondents did not feel as strongly about that issue as the respondents who stated that; *“Politicians do not appear to take my opinions into consideration.”* Of the 41 people who responded to the “Forum” option, only 24% of those people considered the issue to be “Extremely Serious”. Compare that with the 34 people who stated that “Politicians don not appear to take my opinions into consideration.” 41% of those people felt that the issue was “Extremely Serious”. To treat question 3 and question 4 in isolation as overall percentages would be less revealing than comparing them in this way because we can see both the frequency of responses and the strength of the perception of the “seriousness” of the issues.

A similar observation can be made for the third and fourth options to Q3. They are respectively: *“There are limited ways to express opinions to municipal political leaders”* and *“Politicians lack an understanding of the issues they must address”*. The third most common response to Q3 (*“...limited ways to express opinions...”*) received twenty seven responses but only received “Serious” or “Extremely Serious” as a response in Q4 a combined 44% of the time. Compare that with the twenty responses to the *“Politicians lack an understanding...”* option. That choice received a “Serious” or “Extremely Serious” response a combined 80% of the time. In short, the frequency with which respondents chose an option is not necessarily directly related to the perceived “seriousness” of the issue.³

³ More on these types of observations will be included in a supplementary interpretations report.

That said, the chart below illustrates “how serious” people felt about the issues they chose in Q3 of the survey as an overall percentage.

Q4) In your opinion, how serious of a problem is the issue that you selected in Question 3?



This chart illustrates that all but 2% of respondents to this survey consider the issues presented to be at least “Somewhat Serious”. A combined 78% of respondents felt that the issues offered in Q3 were “Serious” or “Extremely Serious”.

Question 5

Question 5 of this survey was an open-ended question that allowed respondents to provide any additional comments. This question generated 77 comments, all of which expressed a variety of themes and suggestions and were, on average, approximately 50 words each in length. As such, we will include the Verbatim Comments for this question in the Appendix of the report. It is our intent to compile a more in-depth thematic analysis as a supplement to this report in the future. An overview of the themes contained in the comments has been created below.

Briefly:

Total Comments: 77

Average Comment Length: 50

50% of People made a comment to this question

Many of the issues raised in question 5 could be classified into two general categories.

Public Apathy:

- Despite municipal issues directly affecting people, there are issues that many people consider to be mundane and boring.
- People who do have legitimate concerns to raise do not even consider taking them to town hall.
- Communities like Courtice are geographically spread out and lack a central area, lack cohesion of community spirit leading to a reduction in municipal involvement.
- Overall, more and more people are disinterested in political matters no matter what level they take place at (municipal, provincial, federal).

The Municipal System:

- There is a perception that only the “old boys network, developers and well connected people” in the municipality have the ear of the municipality.
- People do not feel that municipal politicians and staff really listen to people with concerns and take appropriate action on their issues. Many of the comments cite examples from the recent incineration debate and the decisions rendered by council.
- There is a perception that councilors make decisions without fully understanding the issues or the consequences of their decisions.
- Municipal Council proceedings are not easy to follow/understand unless you have access to the full agenda in advance.
- There is the perception that public participation at council can be intimidating. It is not as user friendly as it could be.

Verbatim Comments are presented in Appendix I

Concluding Remarks

The survey results identify two broad categories of issues that are thought to contribute to the low voter turnout in Clarington's Municipal Elections.

First, is the lack of awareness amongst the public regarding municipal issues and how those issues affect them. Second, there is frustration amongst many respondents when interacting with the systems in place at the municipal level. Often respondents report a lack of transparency, an adversarial climate and the belief that their points of view are not taken seriously into consideration.

The survey comments support the notion that no single issue has caused this situation. Nor does there exist a single solution to remedy the situation. The comments indicate that whatever the solutions may be, the desired result would be a positive change in the public's attitude and response toward participating in the municipal democratic process.

The following are some of the suggestions made by respondents that cover the range of issues that were raised in this study:

- Look for ways to enhance young people's engagement in the municipal political process
- Develop a communications campaign highlighting the importance of participating in the democratic process (include all three levels of government)
- Develop media campaigns highlighting how we are impacted by decisions made by municipal council
- Provide a multi-media approach to communicating issues that are going to be addressed by the Municipality.
- Provide access to background information concerning these decisions. And provide information about recent decisions that have been made at council
- Organize forums where people can learn and debate municipal issues in a fair and open manner.
- Look for ways to make Municipal council meetings more user-friendly and easier to follow.
- Explore ways for members of council, staff and the general public to engage in discussion in a fair and open manner.
- Look for ways to enhance media coverage during municipal elections. Hold election forums in all communities across the Municipality
- Consider including referendums on the Municipal ballot to raise the level of interest in the election.
- Pursue methods to ensure that all residents have convenient access to vote in Municipal elections.

These are a range of suggestions that include: educating the public (especially young people) about the importance of municipal politics and participating in the democratic process; the necessity of making municipal politics more accessible and understandable (transparent); expanding media coverage; and encouraging respectful discussion and debate.

Public participation in future municipal elections will only be positively impacted if a range of strategic initiatives are undertaken. It is therefore important to continue to explore these and other suggestions, bring stakeholders to the table, engage them in discussion and debate and develop a set of realistic initiatives that can be implemented and measured in order to affect change and increase participation in future Municipal elections.

The intent of this exercise was to collect the perceptions of residents and ideas for consideration. The reasons for a lack of public awareness and existing levels of frustration are manifold. The solutions will likely require a multi-faceted approach. It is clear that there are an abundance of ideas on how to address the issue of voter turnout in Municipal elections. Hopefully this survey will serve as a catalyst to begin discussions on how the community can begin to move forward to address this issue.

APPENDIX I – Verbatim Comments

Q2) What do you think should happen to improve participation in municipal elections?

- More door to door campaigning by candidates primarily expressing the importance of voting, if not for them, just vote.
- If not already being done - include mandatory education on municipal, provincial and federal gov't roles and responsibilities in high school curriculum - if this is already being done perhaps look at how it is being done and explore ways to improve it's impact on building future voter engagement
- A full page interview of each candidate in the local paper - Who, what where why how when and all of the issues discussed (not just their favourites)
- An ad blitz that states categorically that you have no right to complain about the decisions made in the municipality if you did not vote! "No vote-no dis" "No voting, no bitching or complaining"
- A campaign to illustrate how important municipal politics is, and to get out and vote. Also some kind of forum to show people what issues at stake by voting.
- A clear understanding of the issues that are being debated is imperative to voting. The last election I wasn't that informed in the issues at hand. It made voting very difficult. A website or something that could clearly list the issues involved and the different points the candidates would help to increase knowledge.
- A local daily newspaper or electric media could provide a synopsis of council decisions and pending council business. An informed public might be more likely to vote. The cable channel could preview the agenda to highlight items of interest to draw viewers who have a specific item of interest.
- A more widely advertised series of debates between the candidates could help, as well as engaging young voters and soon-to-be voters as an attempt to increase future interest in local politics.
- Add \$10 to the tax bills of those who don't vote.
- Allow people to vote online
- An excellent question; if I had a solution, I'd set up a consulting company and assure my retirement. In a democracy such as ours, voting is as much a responsibility as it is a right. Somehow, citizens must be reminded of that. Unfortunately, small, well-organized interest groups with narrow political agendas can have a significant influence on the results of a municipal election due to voter apathy. Here are a couple of thoughts. Consider a brief advertizing campaign prior to the election reminding citizens of their responsibility to vote in municipal elections. Impress upon them the facts about the significant role of municipal government outlined in the introduction to this survey and the importance of their vote in securing a balanced municipal government. Ask each candidate to include a phrase such as "Exercise your responsibility - VOTE" on their campaign literature during the next election.
- Any kind of incentive program; increase information re: municipal issues available to potential voters
- Apart from giving everyone a first hand experience in a non-democratic state, I am not sure that there is much that can be done.
- Attempting to reach the younger population. ie. those of voting age that leave the political "stuff" up to us older folks as they really can't be bothered to be informed about issues relevant to all of us. Perhaps they feel they haven't the time nor energy to be informed.
- Attract candidates who people can connect with and who people believe understand and care about 'their' issues.
- Better education of the electorate on the importance of municipal issues to their daily lives
- Better education on responsibilities of municipal government
- Better explanation of issues and more clearly outlined explanations candidates position on these issues.
- Candidates do not work hard enough to relate to the constituents.
- Communications between the candidates and the electorate must be improved. New and more effective ways of opening dialogue between the two parts must be created. I suggest that increased use of electronic social networking systems such as Facebook could raise the issues more effectively and improve the profiles of politicians. It could also increase the interest of the younger voter demographic.
- Consider scheduling the election night NOT on a reality TV show night. It seems that people in Clarington watch a

lot of TV. Maybe have a choice to vote by email...

- Distribution by municipality or local newspaper of summary of bio 's with commentary on three top issues
- Documents outlining what is going on at Clarington Council on a regular basis. What is being discussed and what impacts its having on everyday life
- Don't just talk about caring about the public during election times - show it all the time!!
- Don't know.
- Easier access such as on line voting.
- Educate them on what they will be voting on
- Enact legislation or a bylaw that penalizes voters for NOT voting like Australia and New Zealand does. In other words, if you do not vote, you are fined.
- Everything is fine the way it is.
- Forums runs by election process are usually attended by residents who already vote. Need to find a way to reach non-voters with issues that affect their lives directly. This poll is a good start.
- Free Food! Bring food people will listen
- Full disclosure of donors during campaign, tighter limitations on campaign contributions and spending, less control given to mayor and council when it comes to public input during meetings and community groups.
- Further promotion of issues that actually make a difference to property owners within the municipality (ie. issues that impact property owners directly)
- Get people involved and make them aware about the significance of their vote. Generally, individuals need to feel important and a part of the community.
- Get people more connected with their community... right now people do now feel that they are part of it so they are not concerned about the decisions that are made.
- Get the people to know there are three levels of government
- Give more options for voting such as on-line voting
- Greater emphasis on political education in the school system and a higher profile of issues and candidates in the media.
- Greater information provided outside of election periods as to the value and importance of decisions made at municipal level and the various stands that individual municipal politicians have regarding major issues.
- Have a major possibility of tax spending be part of the campaign. Now for instance if we had known about the 'incinerator' we would have asked their position
- Have electronic voting
- Have true honorable campaigns and candidates unfortunately its politics and the small town mentality which hurt our people and our Municipality.
- Honest politicians
- I believe that more community associations should be formed and that the municipal politicians should encourage this as a positive way for residents to become involved and that these associations would act as conduits to their local areas in the municipalities regarding local issues.
- I honestly don't know.
- I know many people chose not to vote rather than make an uninformed decision. You can't make people attend a debate or read the newspaper but I believe that making all information as visible and accessible as possible is the only way to reach people. Not much of an answer, I know but I would love to hear some creative ideas!!!
- I think Australia has the right idea: it is THE LAW and everyone must vote, like it or not, subject to heavy fines. However, there is a hole in that procedure, those who are forced likely have NO idea what the issues are and stick a check-mark beside anyone. A second method might be to transport non-voters to live in China for a couple of years where they can't vote at all (completely unrealistic solution, of course).
- I think that municipal councillors and politicians should engage the public more and not just be a face that we put to a position, they should be people that we know we can count on if we have a problem that we feel needs to be addressed, and they will do this on behalf of us. As they are supposed to be representing their constituents needs.
- I think that the most influential motivator to get someone to vote is a strong urging (often involving a long discussion that 'yes, trust me: voting really does make a difference') by a trusted friend or family member.
- I think there is a disconnect between our municipal politicians and the general public. It comes from a number of

sources. 1. politicians think they know better because they are given information that the public does not know. 2. Politicians perceive the public as being vested in their own circumstances and do not consider issues for the greater good. 3. Media coverage and debate is limited so people do not get a solid idea what the issues are. What needs to happen in that greater communication about the issues, greater opportunity for real debate. And greater opportunity for the municipal government to engage the public in a fair and open manner.

- Increase public awareness
- Increased communication through local media outlets and greater access to elected municipal officials.
- Increased information campaign.
- Information packages sent to each household quarterly to identify top 5- 10 issues that municipal government is dealing with (and updates of past lists).
- Inspire and engage high school students to become more active in the process - hold candidate rallies during lunch recess - the students' interest will in turn inspire their parents to pay attention to the issues and the candidates.
- Internet voting---make it easy to vote. Unfortunately having an ineffective council that appears to do very little or the things they do are "silly" makes people turn away from local politics and then it is difficult to get them interested enough to vote
- It doesn't matter what improvements are made. NO matter how easy you make it for people, many simply don't care.
- Keep the debate alive between elections to maintain awareness and interest.
- Less bashing of the other candidates and just explain their platform
- Local television debate, date and time well publicized
- Local television debate
- Lower the voting age in municipalities to 16. Engage students before they go off to post secondary. Force politicians to engage residents at an earlier age. Create more inclusive forums for debate and discussion beyond the regular hum-drum of Council Meetings. Polling stations should be a fun place to visit with live music and local food and a celebration of your vote.
- Mail in or internet ballots - forums or debates that are also posted on web for those who cannot (or will not) attend in person
- Make it a true civic duty by making voting mandatory. Make it easier for people to vote. I bet we will have a better turn out next election with electronic voting in place.
- Make it easier to vote, and cut out the back-stabbing campaigning.
- Make it more convenient/ most often I have not heard anything from the politicians before the vote
- Make politicians more transparent and visible to constituents.
- Make sure politicians are actually held accountable for their promises. People are tired of hearing one thing and doing another. If they saw accountability they may participate more.
- Make them mandatory.
- Mandatory vote, e-voting, mail in,
- Maybe the municipal politicians should to take the time to talk with the middle class families and listen to their concerns instead of always catering to the "business people and the upper middle class" all the time.
- More advertising to let residents know when and where they can vote,
- More creative campaigning to outreach to those groups who don't normally pay attention to municipal politics.
- More direct contact with local politicians
- More education early on (elementary and secondary school) of the importance of voting. I think that some people may feel their lives are too busy to vote so they don't take the short amount of time out of their schedule. I think word of mouth would greatly improve voter turn out (i.e. Door to door visits)
- More effective campaigning to bring the candidates' views on local issues to the public and create more public interest in municipal elections.
- More forums for politician's to hear from the people in their communities
- More opportunities for the general public to meet and discuss/question issues important to them prior to elections.
- More opportunity for the general public to meet the candidates- doesn't need to be the big "debate" venue, but I think a lot of people don't really KNOW their representatives and what councillors actually DO
- More town hall debates in public venues during election campaigns (well publicized) and more "open council"

question periods for residents unconstrained by the formalities and niceties of "in-session" council meetings. People need to become more familiar with who our councillors are and what they are doing on our behalf, so that elections take on a greater relevance.

- More useful information about municipal issues relevant to most people could be conveyed to voters, by a number of methods e.g. media, politicians themselves, factual and timely (non-self promoting) municipal newsletters etc.
- Much more public information (and education) about municipal/regional and even boards of education issues. At election time, an Elections 101 primer?
- Need stronger community members/activists/champions running for office. They need to outreach to voters to compliment an aggressive neutral municipal -- ""you need to vote - vote local-" campaign.
- Not sure.
- Not sure.
- Offer online voting - give many options to make it easy to vote. Get opinions of the people and do what you promise.
- On line voting (now happening !)
- Online voting option
- Other
- People get mad at things that happen during the term of office and swear to do something about it, but come election time they forget about why they were angry. A third party such as a newspaper should publish all major decisions and council spending during the term to remind those who forget.
- Perhaps explaining to the general public how important it is for them to vote for their sake of the community and themselves. More education in this regard.
- Perhaps if they were paid a descent wage, we could actually attract better qualified people to run our municipality. It's disheartening when you are picking people on the hopes they will do the least damage rather than on the hopes that they can actually LEAD.
- Personal touch - call people to make them aware of issues and invite them to vote. While many are connected to email, there are still many older people in our community who rely on the phone for communication with others.
- Politicians lack an understanding of the issues they must address.
- Politicians should once again make themselves open to the people instead of limiting the people who elect them only 5 minutes to talk about important issues at council meetings
- Public needs to be educated on the value of local government - how they, one person, can make a change - not possible at other levels of government. This is the closest that one person can get to being an active participant in how government works.
- Public should be encouraged/invited to be engaged about the issues. This is not just via formal presentations, but by actually asking people what they think. Formal presentation at council meetings is very intimidating for most citizens. Perhaps townhalls in communities? The media also needs to be engaged in local politics. At this time, the only local paper I come in contact with that does a good job at this is the Orono Times.
- Put a referendum question (or 2) on the ballot. That has been shown in other jurisdictions to raise interest and awareness and get people out to vote if it is an issue they care about, that affects them or their children directly. Have a questionnaire filled out by all candidates and published in local newspapers. A REAL questionnaire, not easy, typical questions but specific questions so that people can get to know their candidates and the issues.
- raise awareness of issues / utilize social media to make it easy for people to stay in the loop - broadcast to facebook, twitter, linkedin, etc.
- RECRUIT ANYONE WHO IS WILLING TO STICK THEIR NECK OUT, AND MAKE SOME CONCRETE PROMISES AND TAKE THE COUNCIL TO TASK FOR THEIR LACK LUSTER EFFORT
- Refreshing, caring attitudes without competitive back-stabbing and negative presentations, ie:-don't tell me why the 'other' person is unsuitable, tell me what YOU are going to do in a positive way. 2) More needs to be made of the privilege of voting in a democratic country in a world where rights are denied to so many.
- Remove corporate/union campaign donations.
- Sadly, we can't force people to vote, but what if we denied those that resided in the municipality, who were eligible to vote at the last election, and didn't, access to the mayor, council, and anyone else employed at town hall, until the next time they vote! If you didn't vote, you had no say then, and you have no say now! No vote - no

whining and moaning! It may be a violation of their constitutional rights, but not voting, is as well!

- Send in ballots by mail
- Set dates and pick busy, high traffic areas and market it heavily. Have politician speak/present the issues and their own views on how to best resolve or govern and even possibly debate it. Panel style/forums with audience so that people can first hand see, hear and form decision on best person for the job.
- Show the minority extremes of the political spectrum don't dictate by-laws and policies and elected official vote based on the majority of riding opinions not there own. People might then care.
- Show us candidates who are prepared to represent their fellow citizens with integrity and humility. People are tired of having to choose a candidate based on which of them will do the least damage rather than on who will do the most good.
- Somehow hold the candidates more accountable to the voters
- Start at the elementary school level teaching our youth about politics, posters at schools, political debates, information sessions for those interested at a young age, change will only happen from the roots up.
- Teach people why it matters through effective communication. The Mayor's corner was a good thing in the past but it is no longer done.
- The apathy amongst the population is a major concern, most people I talk with say "what's the use they'll do what they want anyways, our position does not matter." Some how respect has to be gained by the politician to truly be a representative of the people rather than an interest group. Good rationale to why decision are made the way they are even if against what some people believe to be wrong gives credibility to the politician. I have attended polling stations in the past, being early at the station I found a number of working people who are fresh and ready for a day's work ready to vote and took the time to be at the station early can't vote because it won't open till 8 or 9. Yes the station are open in the evenings and many do take the time to vote then but also many have put in a days work travelled to and from Toronto and have the family to deal with its just too much to ask to go out and wait to vote.
- The candidates should make more of an effort to listen to the residents and deal with their issues
- The election campaigns shall be continuously by way of staying in touch with the public not only a few weeks prior to the election.
- The media should get more involved ask candidates a lot of questions, candidates should be invited into high schools and engage in questions, there should be more tv coverage of different candidates,
- The people should be more involved
- There are limited ways to express opinions to municipal political leader
- Two suggestions: 1) pay people to vote and b) make municipal politicians jobs full-time (and well paid), perhaps through major restructuring/consolidation of municipal boundaries.
- Unless people care about the information they're given, they won't get involved.
- Vote on line with security codes etc.
- We need to let people know that their vote can make a difference. Maybe for Clarington's next election, all candidates could add the following slogan to their campaign "Your vote matters!"
- We should be barraged with Constant media & personal reminders of Election Day and advised of the person, the election location. Assistance for those who need to vote should be available and well advertised. The people need to know that what they want in their community will be recognized as important. Constituents should have the opportunity to express on Election Day the most important issues that will impact their community during this term and future ones by a survey or questionnaire.
- You need to get more people involved that stare down to earth in campaigns.

Q5) Additional Comments

- Politicians should be more accountable for election promises. Should have Right of Recall. Need to empower constituents so they feel more involved in the electoral process.
- I think my comment re: low quality people is self explanatory, however this is exacerbated by the fact that the stakes at the municipal level are so low.
- A less formal way of communicating to the politicians would be used more by the general public.
- Apathy has set in, difficult to overcome.
- Each ward councillor should use this type of forum to receive commentary from their ward members
- Effective municipal government requires leadership from both politicians and municipal staff. Politicians come and go and can't be expected to be knowledgeable in all aspects of running a municipality. Municipal staff must have the expertise and long-term perspective to provide good advice to politicians as decisions are made. Politicians have the authority to make decisions on the public's behalf but need municipal staff's recommendations to help them understand what the right decisions are.
- Example is the new incinerator - it's a given & has been for a long time. No matter what the public says or does, the decision's been made!!
- For example: There has been a particularly robust and vocal opposition to the incinerator. If you consider voter turnout and calculate incinerator opposition, the politicians would have to face the reality that far more voters disagree with their leadership in this issue than voted!
- Governments seem to think that their programs are so important that tax payers should fund them without question. Waste is rampant.
- Health and economic sustainability are very important matters in our community and there are many issues surrounding these subjects. Waste, public transportation and vehicle emission/congestion issues are at the forefront.
- Hold all-candidates meetings in all Wards. Let people ask questions of all candidates. Let the people get to know the candidates. Because of the larger slate of positions being voted on in municipal elections, many people who don't know much about the candidates don't bother to vote. A town like Courtice, with no focus, no 'downtown', no real community spirit due to poor planning and development over the years, has no reason to have a large turnout. Most are young families (no spare time) and so many are commuters as that is how Courtice has been developed. Orono is much smaller, but has a focus point, has a Town Hall, has a real sense of community. They get out and vote because they feel involved. Courtice residents feel left out so interest wanes. Some residents appear to be listened to (Wards 3 & 4) while those in Ward 1 and somewhat in Ward 2 are less likely to be taken seriously. That is the impression, if not the truth. Our Mayors for so many years have all been from the east part of Clarington. Maybe with a Mayor from west Clarington the people would begin to feel more like a part of Clarington instead of a part of Oshawa.
- I am a poor one to ask anything, because the voting public of Canada makes me SICK. More and more I hear comments like, "It doesn't matter, because they're all alike anyway (politicians)" Then, the same people settle down to grumbling when the outcome is announced. Canadians have had it too good for too long (a sad truth). Problem is, we are so used to having it so good that we think it will last forever. Already we are beginning to sound more and more like the ancient Romans: bread and circuses. To those who DO listen, it is a matter of who is giving out the goodies this term; for those who don't, "They're all the same". A Catch 22 Situation. Of course there are some poor politicians, just the same as there are poor doctors, teachers, lawyers, plumbers and electricians, but a few dolts doesn't mean the whole profession is tainted. Despite its drawbacks, the Australian method is a good one, like it or not. And even as I say it, that pains me: when did it get to this point that it is necessary for a whole country to FORCE its citizens to participate in democracy, especially when around the world there are people who are murdered because they are trying to attain it? Sad business.
- I believe that our politicians are largely informed genuine people. The mundane issues that they have to deal with are largely important to only a few involved people that none the less still must be done reidt to them for this work. The topics that are more broad based are often overlooked as the public sees mostly those mundane issues.
- I believe that politicians are barraged by lobbyist, be it developers, industry, business organizations and of course Federal & Provincial political parties. Some influence has to seep into the decisions that are made at a Regional

and Municipal level. Financial or other gains may secretly happen.

- I do believe (and no, it's not naive) that politicians essentially do what their people want. But damn it, the people are so silent. It's amazing how many people will talk to you for 10 minutes about how (and this is a made up scenario) their nearby park needs extra benches for the group of seniors who come by every day, but when you ask them 'have you spoken to your councillor?', the answer is always 'no'.
- I have had one instance where a council debate had direct impact on my family and I was informed/invited to chambers to participate. I spent hours waiting for the topic and had to leave after hours of discussion about the 407. The 407 is important, but not the reason I attended that day. If more detailed information had been forwarded to me I may have been able to better plan my day and be a part of the system rather than disappointed in wasting my day.
- I recognize they are trying to provide opportunity for and hope they continue to allow input from the community.
- I think most people think that they alone cannot make a difference so it is not necessary for them to get involved.
- I think most people think the municipal work is EASIER than it really is- the time that each regional and local councillor puts into the job and the hours for the Mayor's position- most regular people would never consider working like this. They only see the meetings on Rogers cable, or pay attention when important issues come up. Here, in Clarington, many people don't see any problems with the proposed the incinerator or they are extremely AGAINST it. Also- issues like the 407 feeder roads, the nuclear generating Station- these are big issues and I think people don't feel the councillors are responding appropriately to these issues. I think people are fed up with the wrangling that happens especially after the last election with the issue of the allowable campaign expenses that is still going on.
- I think that improvement will only happen if the political culture truly changes. The culture shift must include, problem solving not partisan politics, it must include debate and understanding for the greater good and not for personal gain. It must look at issues and problems from a long term, not a short term basis. It must be inclusive and not exclusive and tolerant of all points of view. These are not issues exclusive to Clarington. But if Clarington were to work to address them. Then we might actually lead the way on something positive for a change.
- I would say one of the main issues in this year and previous year has been the incinerator issue. Seems there is an active resistance to the matter. People I spoke to felt the it was a done deal why bother, no one listens. This issue was scewed by the fact the Region of Durham was pushing this issue but the action of the current Clarington Regional councillor seemed indifferent to the concerns of the electorate. I don't think many of those active will forget these councillors to the Region from Clarington.
- I've always found the politicians in Clarington to be approachable and receptive to comments in both formal and informal settings. They may not agree with my point of view but I've never thought for a moment that they were not hearing what I've had to say. I'd be very interested to receive the results of this survey and learn of any recommendations that may be put forward to improve voter turnout.
- If people were aware of the impact that municipal and regional government has on their lives, I think they would be more inclined to get involved, even if it is only to cast a vote.
- If we have an opinion, do they really listen, enough to change their minds. Often I get to a point of not believing that they really want to do the best for us, only the best to be re-elected. The newspaper coverage is there, but seems to be one-sided. That would help to get people seeing both sides and maybe seeking more information on their own to make a decision.
- If you have an open forum people will be informed, and have a better understanding
- In my opinion, the restrictions on accessibility to the process of addressing concerns turn people off of participating in "The rich man's game" of feathering one's own nest at other's expense.
- It appears and being repeated over and over again that most of our politicians are the same bunch of people supported by the development industry- housing, clearing, quality of life and environment is not an issue.
- It can be intimidating to go to a council meeting to express concerns.
- It seems evident that 'old-style' politics attracts 'old-style' candidates, election teams and ideas. Fresh ideas and approaches should be encouraged.
- It seems that politics is based on what is in it for me - not for the people.
- It seems to me that regardless of who gets elected - things carry on gong the same way. If this really is the case, voting at municipal elections only serves to let the public think that they have some say in how things are run.

- It would help if television coverage of municipal meetings was better suited to the viewer. Once you get past the opening comments and presentations does anybody really have any idea what is going on?
- Just look at the incinerator issue - the majority of politicians did not listen and this affects us all in a huge way!
- Let the politicians do their job and listen to the middle class.
- Many of my neighbours have a very limited understanding of the political process and current issues.
- Mayor and regional councillors not taking Clarington's concerns first. Issues are too numerous and in depth for councillors to educate themselves on to make informed decisions. Only rely on XXX not department heads to give direction. XXX not making informed decisions, even being on record as saying he signs papers put in front of him without fully understanding content. That's bad. Mayor is head of council but needs to accept and debate councillors' views, not immediately condemning them because that was not his position.
- More information sent out to voters
- Most people don't care. If things aren't easy for them they won't do it. I always vote and make sure that my family votes. If there is a topic that is extremely controversial that will get the voters' attention and draw them to the poles.
- Numerous issues have come up in the Aspen Springs area that are only getting worse and council seem to be spending more time worrying about DBIA problems than planning on issues with growth in this area (ie traffic problems on 57 and the lack of decent access to other parts of Bowmanville west area by foot (railroad crossings))
- Of all levels of government, the municipal politician is likely the most thankless. Somehow profiling the individual politicians and highlighting the job they do on behalf of fellow residents might improve public opinion.
- Once elected, the politicians need to be WELL informed on the issues at hand, listen to the public BUT THEN go ahead and make a decision even if it does not please everyone. We elected individuals with the hope that they can and will do their job in an informed professional manner.
- Our politicians are making a grave error by supporting this horrible choice. Why should little Clarington shoulder the environmental burden for gigantic Durham region and York Region. We are being sold!
- Overall, I think that our local council is doing a wonderful job. However, I was concerned recently when the budget was handed over to the CEO to "fix" & there was not opportunity for the community to give input.
- People who live in Clarington must be able to exercise their right to decide the direction that the municipality will take with regard to expansion, the kind of business desired in the area, and all future decisions. Their decisions must not be made by developers and business's who are only out further their own interests.
- Planning, planning and planning. Engage the people if you have to stand on the corners naked and scream, but life will be different for virtually everyone -- NOW is the time to discuss this and make it part of the political landscape.
- Politicians are quite happy to let lobbyists (and sometimes staff) tell them what to think about an issue.
- Politicians need to once again my council open to the people who elect them. The XXX runs the municipality (poorly at that) & needs to be removed from his position. How can 1 person control council and staff to get his way?
- POLITICIANS PLEASE STAND UP FOR SOMETHING AND BE NOTICED AND YOU ARE GUARANTEED TO GET A MUCH LARGER VOTER TURN OUT. SHOW PEOPLE THAT YOU ARE PASSIONATE ABOUT SOMETHING - ANYTHING. DON'T JUST GO TO MEETINGS AND GO THROUGH THE MOTIONS OF REPRESENTING THE VOTERS. TAKE ACTION. MAKE SOME NOISE. MAYBE FOLLOW MEL LASTMAN OR SOMEONE LIKE HIM. MAYBE EVEN "THE BUCK STOPS HERE"
- Politicians should be aware of operational procedures in all departments as it relates to providing municipal services. For example, do elected representatives understand what is involved in a re-zoning application?
- Regarding issues like EFW, things get auto-approved with no real possibility that people can debate them seriously. Clarington and Durham as a whole are dumping grounds for other municipalities.
- Sadly, few politicians appear committed to informing residents/voters about issues that are contentious and/or complex. Many appear quite happy that few people are interested and/or have the time to follow issues and scrutinize politicians' track records
- Since we moved to Bowmanville, it appears that every mayor has his/her own agenda and will do anything in his/her power to see that it's taken care of before any other business is addressed. They forget that we put them there and that they should be handling the issues that are important to us, and not to them. Voting on issues at the Regional level that the residents of Clarington do not agree with is a perfect example of this.
- The current mayor/council has appeared to have limited who, what & how citizens can address council. If people

cannot express their point of view to elected officials in a public forum than the council/mayor is perceived as having an interest in opinion.

- The garbage gets picked up, the snow gets plowed, the taxes aren't as high as Oshawa's - so people's lives are too busy to worry about the day to day operations etc.
- The general public is not knowledgeable of politics and therefore do not want to vote for someone that is possible the same as the one that was there before or for someone that could be worse and for that reason they abstain from voting. In my opinion politicians shall be in contact with the general public regularly to get input from them not only when they need their vote.
- The issue around the garbage incinerator is a perfect example of how council was able to make a decision that was expedient but not in the best long-term interests of citizens because they were not required to be open and forthcoming. Only those with a keen interest and some perseverance were able to stay abreast of what was happening, and such people do not seem to have the ability to reach large enough numbers of people to have an impact on public opinion. It almost seems like council relies upon public ignorance in order to avoid accountability.
- The lack of consultation with the public re: decision to progress with incinerator project & lack of transparency in the governmental decision making process is an excellent example of politicians not taking constituent opinions into consideration.
- The media ought to ask all candidates questions put the interview in the local newspaper, let the public decide, the last municipal election was based on John Mutton's personal-life, and candidates for regional and local council or school board were ignored, so those with big names won.
- The municipal and regional councils seemed to have an agenda and rushed the whole issue of incineration through the process. If you weren't on their side of the issue they didn't want to communicate with you even if you asked them a specific question.
- The politician who work for the people are controlled by a overpaid XXX who will receiving 12% raised next year. After passing the personal agenda of all department heads 3-6-9. They are cry for cut backs but there is some much waste that it is scary.
- The public tends to get involved when something goes wrong and it would be great to see people show an interest because they like the way things are running and they want to see that continue.
- The reprehensible behavior of the current council re: the incinerator shows exactly how out of touch these politicians are with their constituents, whether for the project or against the project it seems this group intended and did make a decision without considering the majority of the population. Prior to this particular issue was the Greenbelt Issue once again politicians acting with their own agenda in mind not fairly representing the voting public. That being said this is not simply a Clarington issue. The holier than thou attitude is present in all levels of government and people feel their voice will not be heard. Why vote if nothing matters and politicians would seem to do what they want anyway
- The results of an election would probably be the same whether 50 per cent vote or 90 per cent. Imagine a poll of 50 per cent of the population versus 90 per cent. Both are probably statistically very accurate representations. I think this government focus on voter turnout is a bit of a red herring. Spend more time dealing with issues and not fretting about the people who for whatever reason do not care to vote.
- There is a lack of spark in our municipal representatives. the mayors lack of speaking skills is an embarrassment.
- There is such a lack of education in politics in schools that unless parents are interested, fewer children learn the importance of it. Eventually leading to adults that haven't a clue.
- They have to work to have town employees realize that they work for the people and anything they can do to make it easier for people to develop and start business in town is important.
- This survey is a good idea. Thank you.
- This town council is ineffectual, and doesn't really listen to constituents (and I am not talking about Energy from Waste)....they are just too "small town" and listen to the "ol'boys club"
- Those who represent people in any level of government must be in tune to what is going on in the district they represent. An ongoing dialogue with the people that live in the district seems to be imperative to do the job well. Where does this happen?
- Unfortunately, money talks, and very loudly. Why do numbered companies care, who gets elected? Yet they contribute the maximum allowed, to many candidates! Too many votes in council seem to have outside influence,

especially when a councillor's vote flips, with no justifiable reason! Do we want councilors that vote and represent, the constituents of Clarington, or some filthy rich corporation or developer. There should be more questions on this survey, you've barely scratched the surface. What about minimal qualifications? Shouldn't candidates for council have to have a predetermined level of reading and comprehension skills?

- Unless public meetings for the purpose of addressing local politics are made more available (currently, they have been limited mostly to weekdays which conflicts with most people's work schedules) the difficulty in expressing opinions directly and in an open forum is going to continue. More open forums should be made available for important topics to allow for various opinions to be debated.
- Unlike Bowmanville and Newcastle, the forgotten residents of Courtice do not have a town square/hall in our own community to share our views and ideas and to feel more like a community. It's hard to feel engaged in any process living in Courtice.
- Voters need to be informed about the impact of local governments (regional, local, boards of education) on their neighbourhoods and daily lives. Considering the existing fragmented council, it might be a welcome change to see a concerted group of candidates (not a municipal party) identifying a vision, issues, and a road plan for the next 4 and 8 year, and proposing that together.
- Voting for a councillor or mayor becomes just that, voting for a person. Without knowing what we should be concerned about regarding our municipality makes the process robot like. Learning where our tax dollars should be spent would make more sense. Most voters are only concerned when they need a personal issue resolved and other than that they could care less about what is happening in their community. Not an easy task to get people involved but one that has to be addressed.
- We currently lack real leadership and a few reps who simply don't seem to understand the purpose of a united Council and/or the needs of a community.
- We expect our local politicians to be full-time positions and provide full service. Give them the tools to communicate with the voters/residents they represent.
- We're seeing alarming slide in voter turnout at all levels. People who run for public office generally do so to make a contribution to their community, province or country. So the question is not, what more can politicians - or the system - be doing - but how to make more citizens realize that democracy comes with responsibility which must be taken seriously. The expression "Use it or lose it" applies to democracy as well.