



## Poor Richard

# This council an embarrassment and a disgrace

*Aurora council is an embarrassment,  
As from crisis to controversy they go;  
The business of the town is suffering  
As the bitterness continues to flow!  
- Poor Richard's Scrapbook*

In almost 50 years of participating or observing municipal council meetings as a member, a bureaucrat in Municipal Affairs at Queen's Park and a member of the media, I have never seen a more fractious council than the current Aurora Council.

It is an embarrassment and a disgrace!

Granted not all councils are perfect and all have some problems when strong-minded, independent people are elected to office and while they hotly debate issues, personalities seldom play a part.

I well recall some of the council meetings in 1965 when I was first elected to office and Mayor Clarence Davis had to remind Reeve Stu Patrick to watch his language.

And after a few meetings Councillor Jim Murray said he had never seen such a bickering, idiotic council.

But a team spirit for the good of the municipality soon developed and there was a big difference from today as at that time members of council, staff and anybody who wanted to join them after the adjournment of the meeting socialized at the Legion or the Armouries.

Today after almost a year-and-a-half in office, members of Aurora Council failed to develop that team spirit and if anything the bickering and personal remarks are getting worse.

Individually, they are conscientious and hard-working but have failed to come together as a team resulting in procedural disputes, long delays in making decisions regarding town issues, an apparent lack of confidence in town staff by some members and frequent 5-4 votes.

During an all-candidates meeting in October, 2006, when running for mayor, Councillor Phyllis Morris, after listing her experience during nine years on council, said that she was a good listener and knew how to build a team spirit by providing a positive example.

She also said she would help new councillors and that it was time to restore dignity and decorum at council.

During the Mayor's Debate in response to a question about the current council being dysfunctional, she replied that she had introduced the Code of Ethics and it had been lacking at the leadership level by playing favourites and she would ensure everyone's voice was heard.

One of the reasons for the lack of a team spirit may be the cancellation of the traditional off-site retreat for members of council and staff shortly after a municipal election so members could get to know each other.

During the weekend, staff briefed the members, especially new councillors on the issues facing the municipality and, working together, they set a vision for the term.

Then during meals and the social hours members of council developed a bonding or team spirit and a trust in staff.

After the 2003 election, Councillors Phyllis Morris, Nigel Kean and Wendy Gaertner boycotted the retreat and no retreat was planned after the 2006 election, and there should have been one, especially with five new councillors.

The recent raucous debate on the use of e-mails to conduct town business was bad enough, but that wasn't on TV.

The debate on the budget at the last council meeting was a disgrace and it was on TV.

I don't always agree with Councillor Evelyn Buck but I agree with her calling this budget a political budget as it showed once again that some members of council have little confidence in their staff.

Staff members submitted department budgets, along with a business plan, which outlined their achievements during the past year and vision for the coming year.

They were hotly debated at council and some sent back several times.

When the budgets were presented council went through them line by line and spent seven months and innumerable meetings challenging staff in an almost third degree fashion which was completely unnecessary and a waste of time.

If some of the senior members of staff start looking for positions elsewhere, council members will only have themselves to blame.

- \$200,000 in costs +  
2 Integrity Commissioners  
to silence 1 member of  
council!

Just as predicted: 6 of 8 positions gone!