Article 4: Questions Welcome—My Response to a Reader’s Criticism

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A reader recently challenged my first three articles, describing them as biased and insufficiently supported. The reader questioned my criticism of perceived voting blocs, asked whether councillors who oppose the group I criticize should face the same scrutiny, and raised concerns about an individual councillor’s conduct.

I asked permission to publish the reader’s original letter alongside my response. As of publication, I have not received a reply. I have therefore summarized the concerns in my own words, without identifying the reader or reproducing the letter.

These questions deserve consideration. Publishing this response gives readers an opportunity to examine my reasoning, challenge my conclusions and decide for themselves. My responsibility is to explain the factual basis for my views, distinguish opinion from established fact and acknowledge what remains uncertain. That is the standard I ask readers to apply to the response that follows.

MY REPONSE TO MY READER MENTIONED ABOVE: Thank you for reading my articles and challenging them. I welcome scrutiny, including scrutiny of my own conclusions as well as those of others.

You describe the articles as biased. I have openly stated my viewpoint and identified the councillors whose records concern me. This is election commentary, and I do not pretend to have no preferences. Having a viewpoint does not, however, make every factual statement inaccurate or every argument unsubstantiated. The fair test is whether I distinguish facts from opinion, explain my reasoning and consider evidence that challenges my conclusions. Expressing a clearly identified opinion is not the same as presenting an unsupported allegation as fact.

If you identify a specific factual error, please send it to me so I can investigate and correct it.

Regarding your suggestion that I am accusing four councillors of collusion, my first article expressly states: “A shared vote alone does not prove a backroom arrangement or a hidden agenda.” My second similarly states: “Councillors can independently agree. A shared vote does not establish a secret arrangement.”

Those are substantive qualifications. My criticism concerns what I perceive as recurring voting patterns and their implications for accountability. I am asking readers to examine that concern, not presenting a secret agreement as an established fact. My language and humour are pointed, but readers should assess them alongside those explicit distinctions. My responsibility is to explain what supports that interpretation and what remains unproven. A fair assessment of the articles should take both into account.

You suggest there must be a way to determine who voted for or against particular decisions. That is precisely the concern behind my first article. The existence of council meeting videos is not equivalent to a clear, searchable voting record. Where footage does not show every councillor’s vote, viewers may be unable to establish how each councillor voted from that footage alone.

Residents should not have to spend hours investigating how their representatives voted. An accessible record would allow them to test competing interpretations instead of relying on impressions—including mine. Council should also be held accountable for whether it has provided that accessible record. If there are practical or procedural obstacles, residents deserve an explanation of those obstacles and the options for addressing them. As I recall my conversation with the former City Clerk, I was told that Thorold lacked the necessary technology. That explanation did not satisfy me or the residents with whom I discussed it. What technology was missing, what would it cost, and could a written voting matrix provide a practical alternative? I don’t think we need Elon Musk to come to Thorold to solve this problem for us. Some residents questioned whether the lack of an accessible record was convenient for councillors whose voting patterns deserved examination. That is their interpretation, not proof that anyone deliberately obstructed transparency. Nevertheless, the question remains: what steps did councillors take to make their individual votes easier to follow? In my view, meaningful transparency means making the record usable, not merely making meeting footage available. In the few voting sessions I tried to reconstruct, I could not reliably identify every councillor’s vote. Finding a needle in a haystack is difficult enough; footage that never shows the vote leaves the viewer without the needle.

That is why I proposed a voting matrix identifying each motion, its date and every councillor’s vote. Such a record would test my criticism as readily as your suggestion about Handley, DeRose, Longo and D’Angela. My proposal is for a routine, accessible account of each councillor’s vote, rather than relying solely on occasions when a formal recorded vote is requested. Council would need to establish the procedure for producing that record accurately. It should show disagreements within any alleged group as well as agreements. I would welcome evidence that challenges the pattern I perceive. I am not asking for a record designed to vindicate my position; I am asking for one that allows everyone to test it.

Canada Games Park is one specific commitment identified in my first article. My questions concern Thorold’s financial obligations, ongoing costs, local benefits and what the City owns or controls in return. Those are legitimate questions about public spending, regardless of which councillors supported the project. These introductory articles do not claim to have completed those investigations.

My second article examines whether residents believe their participation can influence decisions. It explicitly acknowledges that my conversations with residents are not a representative survey and do not prove how decisions were reached. It also acknowledges that more local evidence would be needed before attributing lower turnout to a voting bloc.

Those limits do not make residents’ experiences irrelevant. Their accounts can identify concerns worth investigating, provided they are presented as experiences and opinions

rather than proof of what the entire community believes. That is the distinction I have sought to maintain.

My third article offers a practical standard for assessing every candidate: define the problem, examine resources and ongoing costs, identify responsibility, explain trade-offs and measure results. I used first-time council candidate Ken Steeve's remarks as an example of communicating that approach.

Relevant professional experience does not guarantee effectiveness in office. In my judgment, however, demonstrated experience managing complex responsibilities, assessing risk and delivering results is a meaningful reason to have greater confidence in a candidate's preparation. Ken Steeve's senior management background at the Darlington nuclear plant is relevant to that assessment. The important questions are what responsibilities he held, what results he achieved and how he would apply that experience to council's responsibilities. The scale and complexity of that work deserve consideration, while the specific project values and responsibilities are likely higher than Thorold's finances and the role a Councillor play. Voters need not treat all résumés as equivalent simply because no résumé guarantees success. Reading between the lines here seem to be obvious to many with his experience.

The same standards apply to the councillors you name as a minority voting group. Appreciating their questions or constructive alternatives does not exempt them from scrutiny. However, shared opposition to a proposal does not, by itself, establish a fixed voting arrangement any more than shared support does. To use your concern in a hockey analogy, the Leafs' defenders are not making the game unfair merely by blocking shots; defence is part of their job. Likewise, questioning costs, testing recommendations and pressing for transparency are legitimate council responsibilities. The analogy does not establish that any particular councillor exercised good judgment; the record must show that. Nor does disagreement with the majority automatically demonstrate independent thinking. The test is the reasoning behind each position and the willingness to reconsider when the evidence warrants it. I would oppose a fixed voting arrangement among those councillors on the same basis: decisions should follow the evidence and merits of each issue, rather than a commitment to support a group. If you believe a different group than I suggested constitute such a voting bloc, please identify the decisions and evidence supporting that conclusion.

Your concern about any candidate deserves consideration under the accountability standards I have set out. It is, however, a different question from whether particular councillors form a fixed voting bloc. If you believe a different councilor other than I mentioned is part of a different voting record because they question other councilors, please identify the relevant examples. Documented findings about any councilors conduct should be assessed on their own merits, and re-election does not erase them. My appreciation of particular contributions is not approval of anyone's entire record. Nor can a re-election establish which aspects of that record voters accepted or rejected.

However, the separate questions I am raising about councilors voting patterns as a bloc do deserve examination. I would assess the actual findings and reasons before drawing conclusions about the proceedings or anyone's motives.

These first three articles establish my concerns, explain my perspective and set out standards I want voters to apply. They also acknowledge important limits on what has been established. The detailed examinations must now provide the records necessary to test those concerns.

You are entitled to disagree with my conclusions. I ask only that the criticism address what I have actually written, including the qualifications, and identify the specific evidence or reasoning you believe is deficient. I welcome that discussion and remain willing to reconsider my views. Broad labels such as “biased” and “unsubstantiated” do not tell me which factual statement you dispute or which conclusion you believe the evidence does not support.

Consider this comparison: if I responded to criticism by saying, “If you don’t like my articles, don’t read them,” I would discourage the very scrutiny I say I welcome. I am not saying that to you. Similarly, City Hall should encourage residents to keep questioning and participating, even when they disagree with decisions. When residents feel their input cannot affect an outcome, some may withdraw, leaving fewer people scrutinizing how decisions are made. That is a concern to investigate, not a proven explanation for Thorold’s turnout. My point is that accessible voting records, reasoned explanations and meaningful engagement help residents judge whether deliberation is open and whether councillors are exercising independent judgment.

Your letter asks for evidence, and that is a fair request. It is also fair for residents to question a perceived pattern before every aspect of it has been established, provided they explain the basis for their concern and acknowledge what remains uncertain. Calling something an opinion does not remove the need for a factual foundation, but neither should uncertainty prevent a legitimate question from being examined. The same principle applies to electronic voting: residents deserve clear explanations of the safeguards, known limitations and reasons for confidence in the system. I am not assuming that you endorse any particular presentation or that the system is unsafe. These are separate issues, each requiring its own evidence. My mandate is to research, explain my reasoning and encourage readers to examine the record and reach their own conclusions. Readers should not have to accept my interpretation, but they should be able to see why I have reached it. You need no special mandate to challenge me; I ask for the same specificity and willingness to consider evidence that you ask of me.

Regards,

Nicholas Bozza

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