Executive Summary: Politics Changes People - Why I Believe This Is Thorold's Most Important Election

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Charts and source notes excluded from the word count and reading estimate.

A personal beginning

I supported Nella Dekker (D'Epiro) when she first ran for Thorold City Council in 2018. I grew up knowing her, attended the same schools and church, and remember her family's hard work and community involvement. Her work with the Thorold Community Activities Group impressed me, particularly the challenge of providing worthwhile services with limited resources, volunteers and local generosity.

Eight years later, I still wish her well. But personal affection and an assessment of an elected representative's record are different things. This election requires voters to examine experience, results and the ability to meet the responsibilities ahead. My central question is how politics changes people, and whether those changes strengthen independent judgment or encourage reliance on familiar alliances.

Experience, judgment and accountability

Our experiences influence what we believe, whom we trust and the choices we make. Experience can sharpen judgment, but it can also create habits that deserve reconsideration. Politics brings additional pressures, loyalties and incentives. Voters need to ask how elected representatives respond to those influences.

Do councillors become better informed and more willing to ask difficult questions? Can they challenge a proposal from a friend or frequent voting ally? Can they recognize when the information before them is insufficient? Years in office matter, but they do not answer those questions on their own.

I am a retired Thorold resident and a self-funded registered third-party advertiser. I receive no pay for this work. My experience operating my clinics and a national medical think tank taught me to value preparation, evidence, capable teams and measurable outcomes. I have political preferences, and readers should assess my commentary with that in mind. My aim is to encourage scrutiny and independent judgment, including scrutiny of my own conclusions.

Think outside the bloc

I believe recurring voting alignments involving Nella Dekker, Ken Sentance, Tim O'Hare and Mike De Divitiis warrant examination. I use the political description "UN-FAB FOUR" for that pattern during the current term. O'Hare and De Divitiis first joined council in 2022, so this particular group cannot be applied to the earlier term.

Shared votes alone do not prove improper coordination or misconduct. Councillors can independently reach the same conclusions. The fair test is whether each can explain the evidence, alternatives and reasoning behind a decision. That standard should apply equally to councillors whose positions I support.

Constructive criticism of a vote is not a personal attack. Representatives should be able to explain their decisions without treating questioners as enemies. Residents, in turn, should challenge decisions without assuming every disagreement reveals bad faith. Thorold needs candidates who can think outside the box and, in my view, outside the bloc.

Canada Games Park: an early test

Nella's first term began in December 2018. Within about six months, she was participating in substantial decisions about Canada Games Park on Brock University land in Thorold. Council debated a conditional commitment of up to $7 million in May 2019, and voted 6-3 to proceed with the partnership in December. Nella and Ken Sentance supported proceeding; Anthony Longo, Carmen DeRose and Jim Handley opposed it. [1]

Supporters saw an opportunity to replace aging recreation infrastructure and provide community amenities. Critics questioned the financial arrangements, operating obligations and information available before approval. My concern is whether Thorold secured the best possible agreement and adequately considered needs across the municipality, including Port Robinson, Thorold South and Allanburg.

Disagreement continued when the consortium agreement came before council in 2021. Critics raised concerns about secrecy; Mayor Terry Ugulini maintained that the process had been transparent. [2] In my opinion, the project tested council's ability to handle dissent and public scrutiny. Making an agreement available should be accompanied by a clear explanation of the city's rights, costs, risks and obligations.

This summary does not present a verified long-term cost projection or claim that Thorold owns nothing. Such conclusions require the actual agreement, documented calculations and clear distinctions between total project costs and Thorold's share. Whatever pressures councillors experienced, each remains accountable for their own vote.

A second term and a record to assess

In the 2022 election, Nella placed seventh with 1,506 votes. Jim Handley won the eighth seat with 1,454; Victoria Wilson placed ninth with 1,451. Nella finished 55 votes ahead of the highest-placed unsuccessful candidate. These results establish the outcome, but do not explain every voter's reasons. [3]

I also found no basis for suggesting Nella changed her surname between elections to escape her record. Contemporary coverage called her Nella Dekker in 2018, while official 2022 results listed Nella Dekker (D'Epiro). Voters should assess the record rather than infer motives from a name.

Three second-term decisions deserve particular attention. Nella supported the August 2023 Allanburg townhouse approval at 2248 Centre Street, despite residents' concerns about traffic and water pressure. She opposed seeking an external legal opinion about Canada Games Park in October 2023. In June 2026, she supported opening Lakeview Cemetery's Section A for Muslim burial accommodation; that proposal was defeated. [5-7]

Each decision has its own context. My disagreement does not establish incompetence, dishonesty or improper coordination. It does justify asking how she assessed the information and weighed the alternatives. The supporting charts at the end of this summary identify broader disputes and distinguish verified involvement from individual votes that have not been verified.

Preparation and independent judgment

Councillors should arrive at meetings having read the material, understood the recommendations and identified questions that remain unanswered. Asking for clarification is responsible. Voting without understanding a proposal would raise a different concern.

I recall exchanges that caused me to question Nella's understanding of particular motions. Those recollections should be checked against complete meeting recordings before exact quotations or firm conclusions are attached to them. Readers should distinguish my recollection and interpretation from a verified account.

The questions for every candidate are straightforward: What did you understand when you voted? What information was missing? Did you obtain clarification? Can you explain the decision now? Can you identify occasions when you disagreed with your frequent voting allies?

I cannot know Nella's private motivations. Whether a desire to belong or support a winning side influenced her is a question, not an established fact. Her explanations and examples of independent judgment would help voters make a fair assessment. Community service and personal familiarity should inform that assessment without replacing examination of the record.

Why I believe this election matters most

With six councillor seats available in 2026, I believe Thorold needs representatives who can understand financial information, assess complex agreements, communicate clearly and respect dissent. Council oversees public money, services and infrastructure with long-term consequences. Its responsibility is to govern in the public interest; competent administration and service to residents belong together.

Debate about regional governance and amalgamation makes those abilities especially important to me. I do not claim Thorold has formally been placed on "probation," that provincial monitoring of councillors is planned, or that amalgamation is a predetermined

punishment for an election result. My concern is that preserving Thorold's identity and autonomy requires capable, transparent government that residents can trust.

That is why I believe this is Thorold's most important election. It is my assessment of the stakes, not an established historical ranking. Voters should consider who can manage change, question inadequate proposals and improve the way council works.

Good people still need to be the right fit

I like Nella, remember her service and wish her well. Those feelings do not settle whether she is among the six best choices for the next council. After two terms, voters can reasonably ask what she has learned, what she would do differently and how she would demonstrate independent judgment.

My concern is the fit between the responsibilities ahead and the people we elect. Elections are an opportunity to evaluate performance and change habits that no longer serve the community. We should expect preparation, integrity, clear explanations and a willingness to challenge a proposal, even when it comes from an ally. Choosing the six candidates best equipped for that work is our responsibility as voters.

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Supporting charts and source notes follow

The following appendix reproduces the charts and complete source notes from the full article. Charts and source notes are excluded from the word count and estimated reading time.

Appendix: supporting charts

These charts are excluded from the article word count and reading estimate. Council controversies are not findings of wrongdoing by Nella. Unverified individual votes remain identified as such.

Chart 1: names used in election records

Election	Name I could verify
2018	Contemporary election coverage called her Nella Dekker. [4]
2022	Official results listed Nella Dekker (D’Epiro). [8]

Chart 2: disputed issues during both terms

Issue	Date / period	Her term	What made it controversial / outcome	Nella's verified involvement
Canada Games Park - financial commitment and operating risks	2019-2020	First	Debate over the initial conditional commitment of up to $7 million, future operating expenses and whether enough information was available before proceeding. [9]	Voted for proceeding with the partnership in December 2019. [1]
Canada Games Park - agreement transparency	May 2021	First	Approval of the consortium agreement triggered accusations of secrecy and censorship. Mayor Ugulini maintained that the process had been transparent. [2]	Individual vote not verified here.
Mayor and councillor pay increases during their own term	October 2020; effective September 2021	First	Disagreement over implementing higher compensation before the next council term. [10]	Supported implementing the increase during the existing term.
Jim Handley - conduct findings and penalties	2020-2021	First	Integrity commissioner findings concerning emails and social media resulted in an eight-month pay suspension. The investigation cost approximately $50,000; council also debated the penalties. [11]	Her individual vote not verified here.
Further integrity commissioner findings concerning Handley	December 2021	First	Another report found policy breaches and recommended further restrictions and sanctions. These were findings about Handley's conduct. [12]	Her individual response not verified here.
Fire Station 1 - deterioration and firefighter safety	December 2021	First	A fire chief's report identified asbestos, sewage and diesel-emission hazards, raising questions about the condition of the existing headquarters and replacement needs. [13]	No individual position verified here.
1970 Decew Road development - refusal and tribunal appeal	April 2022-November 2023	Both	Council refused zoning changes in 2022. The Ontario Land Tribunal subsequently allowed the development in 2023. [14]	Her individual vote not verified here.
Canada Games Park - unused ice, track access and financial reporting	2023	Second	Councillors questioned unused facilities, access restrictions, vacant space and the financial information provided to council. [15]	Her individual position on these operational questions not verified here.
Canada Games Park - rejection of an external legal opinion	October 3, 2023	Second	A motion seeking outside legal advice about the financials and consortium agreement was defeated 5-4. Supporters wanted further scrutiny; opponents questioned the need and expense. [6]	Voted against seeking the external legal opinion.
Allanburg townhouses at 2248 Centre Street	August 1, 2023	Second	Residents raised water-pressure and traffic-safety concerns. The revised ten-unit proposal received zoning approval 5-4. [5]	Voted for approval, alongside O'Hare, Sentance, De Divitiis and Ugulini.
Handley - convoy-related conduct findings and rejection of sanctions	June 2023	Second	Council rejected recommended sanctions following integrity commissioner findings related to his 2022 Ottawa convoy participation. [16]	Absent for the sanctions vote.
Partners for Climate Protection program	March-June 2024	Second	Public and council debate over remaining in the climate program; council ultimately withdrew. [17]	Her individual vote not verified here.
Upper's Lane extension and developer disputes	December 2024-January 2025	Second	Council debated whether to continue negotiations amid developer disagreements and concerns about staff time and legal costs. It imposed a January 31 deadline for agreement. [18]	Her individual position not verified here.

Issue	Date / period	Her term	What made it controversial / outcome	Nella's verified involvement
Council size - eight councillors versus six	2025-2026	Second	Disagreement over efficiency, representation and governance reform. The province approved Thorold's request to reduce council to six councillors. [19]	Her individual votes not verified here.
Centre 50+ parking expansion near Memorial Park	2025	Second	Residents challenged the effects on green space and heritage, consultation, transparency and the evidence of parking need. Centre representatives argued additional parking was necessary for seniors. [20]	Her individual vote not verified here.
Lakeview Cemetery - Section A and Muslim burial accommodation	2025-June 2026	Second	Debate over opening Section A, accommodating religious burial requirements and offering relocation of an existing burial. Council rejected opening Section A and approved accommodation in already-open sections. [7]	Supported opening Section A with O'Hare, Sentance and De Divitiis; that motion lost 5-4.
Election events at the seniors centre	September 2026	Second	The City said candidate events at the municipally owned centre may have breached municipal policy. That was a reported concern, not an established finding of wrongdoing. [21]	No personal breach by Nella established in the source reviewed.

Source notes and draft checks

Numbered references apply to the article and appendix. The appendix retains the issues and verification limits from the supplied chart. This first draft is not an exhaustive review of council records.

1. Canada Games partnership, December 2019
https://www.thoroldtoday.ca/local-news/update-2-councillors-weigh-in-on-thorolds-partnership-1901797

2. Consortium agreement debate, May 2021
https://www.thoroldtoday.ca/local-news/thorold-city-councillors-in-heated-exchange-with-mayor-as-canada-summer-games-agreement-passes-3794439

3. Official 2022 election results
https://www.thorold.ca/council-administration/elections/election-2022/

4. 2018 election account and inaugural meeting date
https://www.thoroldtoday.ca/local-news/year-in-review-part-12-1191388

5. Allanburg approval, August 2023
https://www.thoroldtoday.ca/local-news/allanburg-townhouse-complex-divides-city-council-7358220

6. External legal opinion vote, October 2023
https://www.thoroldtoday.ca/local-news/city-council-closes-door-on-canada-games-park-investigation-7639427

7. Lakeview Cemetery vote, June 2026
https://www.thoroldtoday.ca/local-news/thorold-moves-to-accommodate-muslim-burials-at-lakeview-cemetery-12371294

8. www.thorold.ca
https://www.thorold.ca/en/city-hall/resources/poll-by-poll-results-for-web--final.pdf

9. www.thoroldtoday.ca
https://www.thoroldtoday.ca/local-news/council-commits-7-million-to-canada-summer-games-1467570

10. www.thoroldtoday.ca
https://www.thoroldtoday.ca/local-news/thorold-mayor-councillors-gets-pay-hike-after-tuesday-night-vote-2775955

11. www.thoroldtoday.ca
https://www.thoroldtoday.ca/local-news/city-spend-50000-to-investigate-complaints-against-city-councillor-jim-handley-report-reveals-3559718

12. www.thoroldtoday.ca
https://www.thoroldtoday.ca/local-news/integrity-commissioner-says-city-councillor-breached-multiple-policies-again-4835625

13. Thorold News
https://www.thoroldtoday.ca/local-news/asbestos-leaking-sewage-and-diesel-emissions-plague-thorold-firefighters-at-their-own-headquarters-4838726

14. Thorold News
https://www.thoroldtoday.ca/local-news/icymi-controversial-thorold-development-to-move-forward-7847921

15. Thorold News
https://www.thoroldtoday.ca/local-news/canada-games-park-management-grilled-by-thorold-city-council-6842804

16. Thorold News
https://www.thoroldtoday.ca/local-news/year-in-review-another-investigation-into-controversial-councillors-conduct-7977745

17. Thorold News
https://www.thoroldtoday.ca/local-news/climate-change-skeptics-voice-opposition-during-council-debate-8470868

18. Thorold News
https://www.thoroldtoday.ca/local-news/developers-in-thorold-south-cant-stop-fighting-9962604

19. Thorold News
https://www.thoroldtoday.ca/local-news/icymi-debate-erupts-over-future-size-of-thorold-city-council-11238247

20. Thorold News
https://www.thoroldtoday.ca/local-news/residents-demand-transparency-in-thorold-parking-lot-controversy-11604096

21. thoroldtoday.ca
https://www.thoroldtoday.ca/2026-municipal-election-news/city-of-thorold-says-election-events-at-seniors-centre-may-have-breached-municipal-policy-12819342