They Want to Rule — Voters Want People Who Serve: Unapologetic About Expecting Better

Why I am not running for council and who I am supporting

By Nicholas Bozza | Thorold Election Commentary
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Is being unapologetic unethical? That depends on what you have done. Standing by an honest decision is one thing. Refusing to explain yourself when voters deserve answers is another.

In my view, withholding important information, misleading voters or treating reasonable questions as an inconvenience is unprofessional. Calling yourself unapologetic does not settle the ethical question. It simply raises another one: what, exactly, are you refusing to apologise for?

Unapologetic. Unaccountable. Unreal. That is how the UN-FAB FOUR come across to me when the answers do not arrive.

Why I write instead of running

Today, someone asked why I do not run for council. It is a fair question, and my answer starts here: I believe there are enough capable candidates already running to fill the six seats with people who can do the job with integrity.

The voters have to do the homework. That is why I have written these articles: to encourage people to examine the record, ask questions and make their own decisions. If voters remain willing to be fooled, putting my name on the ballot would not magically solve that problem. They might not choose me either.

Ability is only part of politics. Some people seem to enjoy the chaos. Others benefit from the nonsense around it. Some simply want to belong to the tribe. It can look like high school with a municipal budget: everybody wants a seat at the cool table, and nobody wants to ask who is paying for lunch.

People can know a choice is questionable and make it anyway. Belonging is a powerful temptation. Independent judgment requires more effort.

My family comes first

I worked hard, built a successful business with my wife and was fortunate enough to retire young. Hard work mattered, but so did luck and timing. We made it together.

Both my parents died while I was busy working. I wish I had spent more time with them while I could. Now I have one mother-in-law remaining and a wife I love far more than I want the title of councillor.

My wife puts me first. As long as she walks this earth, she comes first, second and third with me. We built the business together, retired together, and intend to stay retired together.

I am 67, in good health and enjoying retirement. My wife is in decent health too. Council would take energy and time I am not willing to take away from our life together. That is my choice, and I am comfortable with it.

Writing this series is the way I have chosen to help Thorold. It has a beginning and an end. It is tiring, but it is a commitment I can make without signing away the retirement we worked for.

I have managed difficult people

Could I do the job? I believe I could. I hired and managed difficult people, including smart, credentialled physicians, without being a physician myself. Holding your own in a room full of very smart people is an education you cannot buy in a weekend seminar.

But I am hardly the only person who could contribute. There are capable people throughout this community who have not come forward. They are running businesses, raising children, helping family members or simply trying to keep their lives manageable.

Many have already achieved something meaningful. They are organised, capable and respected without needing a microphone, a title or a photograph beside every ribbon in town. They have built a life that works for them. They do not necessarily want to rebuild it around council meetings.

Sometimes the timing is wrong. Sometimes they have had enough battles. Sometimes they want to save the energy they have left for the people at home. Those are legitimate reasons.

The jungle mentality

Jim Handley has my support because I believe he brings the experience, integrity and independent judgment Thorold needs. I want to see him elected alongside Carmen DeRose, Ken Steeve and Kieron Daniels, and I encourage voters to support them.

In my judgment, these candidates demonstrate qualities I have not seen from the UN-FAB FOUR in the matters I have criticised. I would go further: I believe each of my endorsed candidates, individually, brings more to the table than the UN-FAB FOUR combined. That is how strongly I believe in the people I have endorsed.

To boot, all four candidates I have endorsed were born and raised in Thorold. That local pedigree adds to my confidence in them: their roots are here, alongside the experience, ability and integrity I believe they bring to the job.

What troubles voters is the political mentality that treats public service as a fight for ownership: rule the community, control the sandbox, protect the territory. Serving people gets lost somewhere between the victory speech and the next fight involving the UN-FAB FOUR.

In that jungle mentality, six against one somehow becomes a fair contest. The pack wins, gathers around the spoils and congratulates itself as a group on a magnificent accomplishment. Apparently, outnumbering someone now qualifies as leadership.

To voters, that is the image: animals feeding after a six-on-one fight, feeling accomplished because they got to enjoy the spoils. It is a metaphor for political behaviour, not a claim about an actual incident or a description of anyone as less than human.

But eventually, the behaviour comes into view. The public can see the imbalance, the unanswered questions and the gap between the polished image and the conduct from the UN-FAB'd. Trust voters: in their experience, elected officials who depend on merely appearing genuine do not welcome scrutiny that challenges that image—or raises doubts about their fitness for the job.

Winning the fight does not answer the question of whether you deserved to win it. And enjoying the spoils does not make you fit to serve.

No one can know what is in anyone's head. But voters can judge the conduct they see, explain their concerns and ask other voters to decide whether it meets their standards.

Why good people hesitate

Political environments can develop a culture that resists anyone who challenges the way things are done. A newcomer who asks uncomfortable questions can quickly discover that the welcome mat was decorative.

Party connections and political loyalties can also make an independent candidate feel outmatched. My concern is that outside loyalties could take priority over local judgment. That is a question voters should examine; I am not presenting evidence here that these four candidates take marching orders from federal or provincial parties.

In an earlier article, I touched on another truth: we all need a little naïveté to attempt almost anything worthwhile. Choose a career. Get married. Have children. If we knew every difficulty in advance, we might never get started.

Council is no different. Once capable people see the time commitment, personal friction and public scrutiny involved, some understandably step back.

That does not mean we should give up. It means we should respect those who come forward for the right reasons and help them stay the course. People who want to serve should NOT have to surrender their dignity as the price of admission.

The pleasure of becoming a nobody

After spending years being somebody at work and in your industry, there comes a point when being a nobody sounds absolutely wonderful. That was part of the attraction of retirement.

Here is my completely invented retirement story. The feelings, however, are real.

The day I retired, I went to Speedy Muffler King to have my muffler repaired. Other customers were relaxing with coffee and cigars, being treated like royalty. I stepped forward, and the fellow behind the counter shook his head.

"Sorry. We cannot service you."

"Why not?" I asked.

"Because you are a NOBODY. We only serve somebodies."

I nearly hugged him. No business title. No industry reputation. No emergency meeting. Just a nobody with a noisy exhaust. My retirement goals had been independently verified by the muffler department. That was the moment I knew I had arrived.

I drove away delighted. The car was still making a racket, but for once, nobody expected me to chair it.

Again, that encounter never happened. It is a made-up joke involving a business name, not an account of its service or policies. But the pleasure of stepping away from being somebody? That part is true.

Support people who want to serve

Life is not always fair, and politics can make the unfairness look like an organised sport. Still, we are allowed to choose—and support only candidates who are willing to explain themselves, exercise independent judgment and treat public office as a responsibility.

My councillor choices are Carmen DeRose, Jim Handley, Ken Steeve and Kieron Daniels, in no particular order. I want experience, fresh energy, constructive teamwork and a willingness to make decisions in public and explain them. I am choosing four candidates; I do not feel obliged to use all six votes.

Let's encourage the Handleys, the DeRoses, the Steeves and the Daniels of the world to keep going because they care about Thorold and can contribute to it.

To borrow the familiar L'Oréal line: "They're worth it."

As for the UN-FAB FOUR, my imaginary campaign salon has questions. Two of the UN-FAB FOUR have very little hair to colour—if any— and the other two appear to have entrusted the job to the municipal procurement department. Lowest bid. No warranty. Colour subject to change after the election.

That is a hair joke, not a product review. L'Oréal has not endorsed the candidates I endorsed, my commentary or my imaginary salon. And hairstyles, of course, are no substitute for judging a council record.

And there is another point voters can weigh: Mike De Divitiis has said he does not live in Thorold. I personally went to City Hall and checked that he met the qualifications to run despite living elsewhere. I regard that route to eligibility as a technicality, but I am not claiming that his candidacy is unlawful. My criticism is about local roots and representation, not his legal eligibility.

A final word from a happy nobody

I love being a nooooooobody. Retirement is like a broken drum—you cannot beat it. A broken drumstick, on the other hand, is what you get when both the joke and the voters have already taken enough punishment—at least, that is what voters tell me.

If you expected better comedy from a free article, please contact the refund department. It is staffed by nobody. At last, a position for which I am perfectly qualified.

You cannot rebrand the UN-FAB FOUR and expect to revive Thorold while keeping the same UN-FAB'd system of leaving their current four-year terms unexplained. A fresh slogan does not answer old questions. Before asking voters for another four years, explain the last four.

The illustrative satire accompanying this article will appear in the Executive Summary.

Please share this article and the commentary website with others before election day. Read the earlier articles, examine the questions and make your own decision: www.thoroldelectioncommentary.ca.

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Opinion and satire notice: This article expresses my judgments and candidate preferences. The UN-FAB FOUR nickname refers to Nella Dekker, Ken Sentance, Tim O'Hare and Mike De Divitiis. The jungle, pack, sandbox, salon and muffler-shop scenes are rhetorical metaphors or invented humour. They are not evidence of coordination, secret instructions, unlawful conduct or a psychological diagnosis. Readers should assess the underlying records and explanations for themselves.