THOROLD ELECTION COMMENTARY

Thorold Bonus Post-Mortem Cleared to Circle (Pre-Landing Protocol Has Begun)

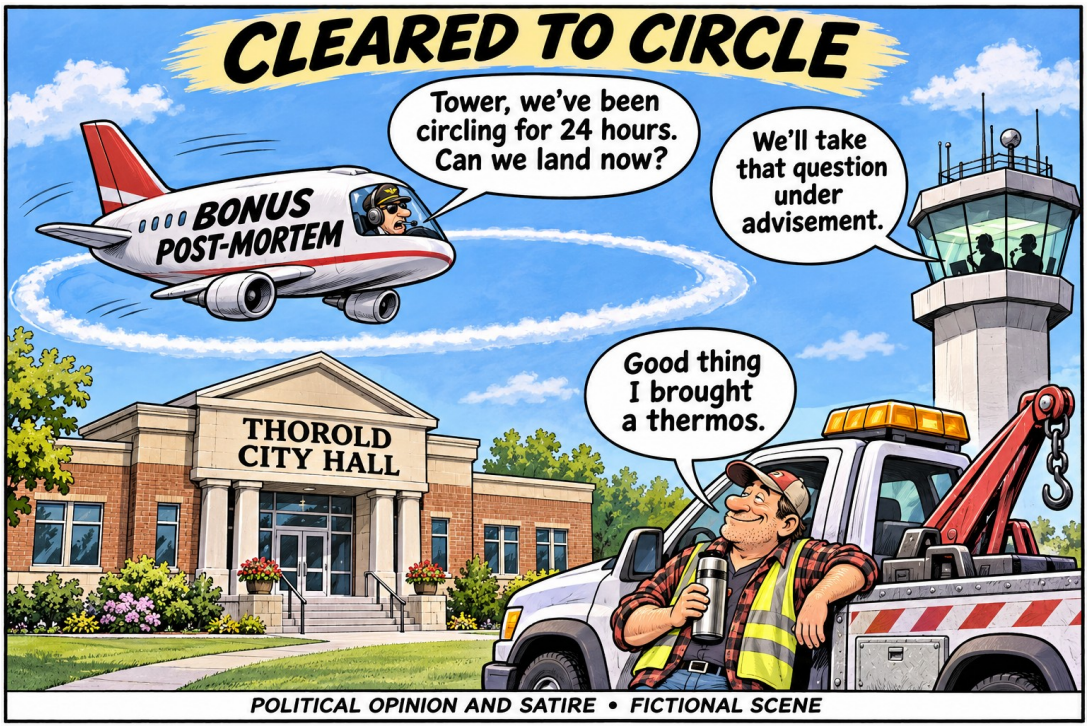
POLITICAL OPINION AND SATIRE

IMPORTANT READER NOTICE — POLITICAL OPINION AND SATIRE. I'm asking direct questions about public decisions, election safeguards and council accountability. The doorstep exchange is a reported account. The City Hall conversation is my recollection. The imagined party arrangement, ballot figures and comic scenes are hypothetical or satirical. Read each passage with its accompanying notice.

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Thorold's only registered third-party advertiser in both the 2022 and 2026 elections.

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I'M STILL HOPING TO LAND THE BONUS POST-MORTEM TODAY. The ambulances and tow truck are standing by. I called the weather office and asked about visibility. "Clear," they said. Then I mentioned City Hall. "How far back do you need to see?"



POLITICAL OPINION AND SATIRE. The flight, tower dialogue and tow-truck scene are fictional. They depict no actual City Hall or emergency response.

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In A Few Good Men, Jack Nicholson's Colonel Nathan Jessup tells the courtroom, "You can't handle the truth!" Here in Thorold, I'd settle for an answer to the follow-up. We can work our way up to the truth.

This setup is a little longer because there's a lot to unpack in the bonus post-mortem. Read this one first and share it with your friends as we come to the end of the series. If the readership count suggests more readers need time to catch up, I may keep the bonus circling a little longer.

TWO WAYS TO DO TODAY'S HOMEWORK

If you voted for one or more of the UN-FAB FOUR, would clear answers before election day have changed your vote? Or do these questions point to reasons all four were re-elected? Pencils down when the tower calls.

1. 60 Minutes. In my imaginary screening room, three of the UN-FAB FOUR take 90 minutes to watch 60 Minutes. **The missing half-hour is expected back from staff in the next term.**

2. The boardroom test. Imagine inheriting a company with roughly **$330 million in assets and $60 million in annual revenue**, using Thorold as the comparison. Would you put any of the UN-FAB FOUR on your board? Especially if the company could mail you a tax bill? **At least with a regular company, the annual report doesn't come with a due date for your next instalment.**

PARTY INFLUENCE. I describe the endorsement as I recall seeing it. The imagined exchange of campaign help for influence is hypothetical. An endorsement alone establishes no such arrangement.

3. Who's in the cockpit? Would knowing a candidate's party ties have changed your vote? Suppose there were evidence the local NDP MPP helped steer votes and coached candidates in exchange for influence once they were elected. Would that change your vote? I'll come back to party influence in the bonus article. **This is a hypothetical. I'm making no claim that the MPP or any candidate made such an arrangement.** However, I saw a post on Nella Dekker's campaign Facebook page endorsing her from the local MPP **(NDP PARTY)**, at a time when many people I spoke with doubted she'd be re-elected. The arrangement imagined above is hypothetical. **If somebody else is flying the plane, I'd like their name on the boarding pass. I also saw the UN-FAB FOUR endorsing each other on their lawn signs including the lawyer** Chantal McCollum, who ran for council and lives outside Thorold. She was endorsed by the **Niagara Regional Labour Council** which, in my view, raises questions about how she would handle decisions affecting organized labour at the city and she was endorsed by the UN-FAB FOUR except Mike De Divitiis, who had stepped away from the mayoral race.

REPORTED DOORSTEP ACCOUNT. I wasn't there myself. People I've known since childhood relayed the account to me, and I verily believed it when I first wrote about it. The remarks below are paraphrased. The punchline is satire.

4. The doorstep test. According to the account I was given, Tim O'Hare told a Catholic homeowner during the campaign that Catholics should be less prejudiced and raised the idea of a heritage designation for Holy Rosary Church. Would that appeal to you as a voter, Catholic or otherwise? **Maybe he was checking whether the homeowner would turn the other cheek. The one above the**

collar, Tim. I found the reported comment particularly jarring given Tim's role on a city committee promoting inclusiveness.

DISCLOSURE QUESTIONS. The concerns below ask what was declared and how residents can raise a question in time. This column identifies no finding of a breach.

5. The disclosure test for pecuniary conflicts of interest. As a registered third-party advertiser, I hear from residents who don't have a place to publish their concerns or don't feel comfortable raising them at City Hall. I put their questions in writing. I've heard no concerns about a pecuniary conflict involving Nella Dekker. When she votes with the same majority, I want to hear her own reasons. Residents have brought me questions about possible financial conflicts involving the other three. When a vote raises a reasonable question about a councillor's financial interest and there's no declaration on the record, residents deserve an explanation. How can they raise that question before the vote? **At City Hall, the voting bloc gets a microphone. The rest of us get a front-row seat to being shut out.**

6. Your money. If you thought council spent your tax dollars poorly, would you vote the same way? When a vending machine eats your toonie, at least there's a number to call. Or were you satisfied with the spending, unaware of it, or still waiting for details? If you were out for the evening, how would you know whether the kids stayed up watching TV on a school night? Same homework for taxpayers: what would you check? When I ask some voters why they backed the UN-FAB FOUR, I get the same blank look I get when I ask the four to explain a vote. Then I bring up a spending decision and hear, "I didn't know that." What did you know about their record when you voted? There's a psychology about it all. I'll come back to that later. **At my house, the one holding the remote has to explain where the batteries went.**

7. Four votes, four explanations. The game starts at eight. You tell your friend you'll pick them up at seven, and every time, they're still getting ready at eight. If they told you to expect the same thing next time, would you invite them again? If those four councillors had told you during the campaign that they'd keep voting together and rarely explain their votes individually in a second term, would you still have voted for them? There are four microphones. Let's see if they all work. And what happens when the UN-FAB FOUR put four explanations through the same wash? **Four shirts went in and one talking point came out. Who's the ventriloquist? Is one of the four doing the talking, or is someone else behind the curtain?** More on this in the bonus article.

8. Licensed to Change the Subject. If City Hall issued a licence for political gaslighting, there'd have to be a practical exam. **Could you change the subject without putting out the pilot light? Which of the UN-FAB FOUR would you give the Golden Pilot Light for gaslighting? (Rhetorical question.) Bonus points if they can accept the award and make you forget what it was for.**

9. The ego meter. At what reading should a councillor get a ticket? Mount the meter beside the microphone. **If the ego meter hits red, the microphone should automatically switch to the public.**

10. Conduct unbecoming. What should earn a councillor a formal reprimand? In my imaginary rulebook, the first offence gets a warning. On the second, you have to answer the original question in public. **For a third offence, the clerk reads the question again, slowly. I thought of this when a**

resident told me Mike De Divitiis took a video selfie at the Remembrance Day ceremony. In my view, that shifted attention away from the people we gathered to honour.

11. The on-campus student vote. Take a student renting an off-campus apartment in Thorold. That student helps cover the landlord's property tax bill (there's a property tax component built into the rent). My understanding is that Brock doesn't pay regular property taxes to Thorold on its residences. Ontario's current voting rules don't require residents to pay property tax. Should contributing to the city's property tax base matter when deciding who gets a vote? **Please fold your hydro bill so it fits through the slot marked "proof you exist."**

BALLOT PACKAGES AND VOTES. The number below is hypothetical. A package mailed to a former address, a ballot returned and a vote counted are separate events. The reports below do not establish that anyone received a vote they did not earn.

12. The mail-in ballot test. Friends who rent out basement apartments told me they received as many as four mail-in ballot packages addressed to former tenants. How often did that happen across Thorold? A thousand is a hypothetical figure. A thousand packages going to old addresses and a thousand ineligible votes being cast and counted are two very different things. The second could change an election. What does the city know about packages sent to old addresses, and what checks were in place before a ballot was counted? **My pizza gets a tracking number, and nobody's asking it to choose a councillor.**

13. The intestinal fortitude test. What happens when a ballot package goes to a former tenant's address and the landlord is also a candidate? Voters deserve to know how the city handles that package. The candidate deserves a clear procedure to follow. I have no evidence that Mike De Divitiis received or used a former tenant's ballot. As I understood it, the UN-FAB FOUR supported mail-in voting for convenience and in the hope of boosting turnout. I don't see evidence that it increased participation, but I do hear from many, many, many voters who doubt the process. You can win enough votes to take a seat and still have to earn voters' trust. (Many, many, many taxpayers I've spoken with feel the way Thorold introduced mail-in voting was unfair. And I concur. Thorold should eliminate mail-in voting. For your homework, look up the council minutes, see how it came to a vote and who voted for it, and decide for yourself.) **A former tenant's ballot shouldn't come with the keys. To be fair to Mike, the city should give any candidate in that position clear instructions. As I understand it, the UN-FAB FOUR still support keeping mail-in voting.**

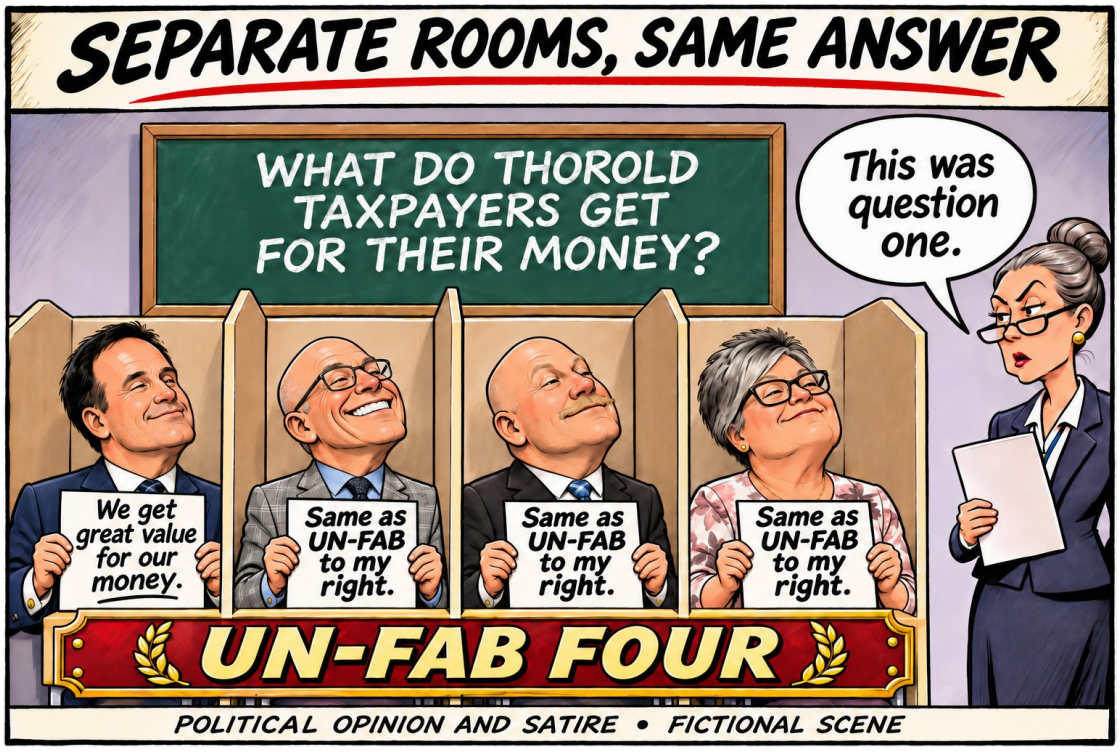
14. The ethics test. If you wouldn't tighten the safeguards even if the city showed you a real gap, **where do ethics and morality fit in Thorold politics? Press one for ethics. Your call is very important to the next term of council.**

15. The landlord on the ballot. If a candidate rents to a lot of students, what would reassure tenants that their vote is their own business? The rent envelope is a dreadful place for a campaign flyer. It already contains one request for money. If ballot packages arrive for former tenants, what should a landlord do with them? And if a candidate pauses to regroup, what safeguards apply every day of the campaign? This is a question about procedure. **A former tenant's ballot isn't one of the amenities that comes with the unit.**

PROPERTY QUESTIONS. A financial stake in downtown property is distinct from a financial interest in a particular council decision. The questions below ask about disclosure and participation in specific votes.

16. Downtown property. Many, many, many residents would like to put these questions directly to Councillors Tim O'Hare and Mike De Divitiis. When a downtown vote could affect a property either of you owns or has a financial stake in, directly or through a company, what did you disclose, and did you vote or step aside? Residents who spot a potential conflict during the meeting don't seem to have a clear way to raise it before the vote is called. Voters want potential conflicts of interest dealt with openly before the vote. **Should Thorold voters put a title searcher on retainer? Maybe we can get a group rate for the next four years.**

17. The IQ test. Should the UN-FAB candidates take a pop quiz? Here's the staff report, the price tag and a resident asking what we get for our money. Three minutes. Both sides of the paper. **Separate rooms.** I want to see whether they still hand in the same answer. **If all four write "same as above," I'm checking the ceiling tiles.**



POLITICAL OPINION AND SATIRE. The councillors are caricatured. The quiz and answers are fictional and do not quote the councillors. The cartoon offers an opinion about council accountability and makes no allegation of cheating or coordination.

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18. The background checks. Criminal records? Marriages or live-in partners? Then there are the questions for my imaginary questionnaire. How many sport coats look like they escaped the WKRP wardrobe? How many Remembrance Day selfies would fit on one memory card? Ask for a family tree and Tim "UN-O'Hare" will have a committee for it before you've found your great-aunt. **By the time the committee finds my great-aunt, she'll qualify for a heritage plaque.**

19. The credit check. Would you ask candidates for a credit score? If you can't handle your own affairs, should you handle the city's? Here's the city budget. **What do you do when revenue comes in low? If "raise the limit" is the whole budget plan, please return your credit card to its upright and locked position.**

RECOLLECTION AND SATIRE. The City Hall conversation is as I remember it. How he looked is my impression. The bit about penance is satire.

20. The City Hall confessional. People have told me they find Tim "UN-O'Hare" divisive. When I ran into him at City Hall, he asked why I'd filmed some of the candidates speaking at the first meet-and-greet and asked what I thought. I told him I'd be sharing voters' views. As I remember it, he said he hoped it wouldn't be hateful and that if he'd walked a straight line he'd have nothing to worry about. He looked worried to me. As I remember it, he walked away before we finished talking. That gave me the idea for the confessional joke. **In my version, he left the confessional before the penance, so I'll have to put it on the next agenda.**

The bonus post-mortem is still circling. I've kept the volunteer firefighters on standby and told the tow truck to watch the ditch for straight answers. So far, it's had a quiet morning.

After 24 hours of trying to land this bonus post-mortem, I still can't get a straight answer from the tower. And now, in my imaginary control room, the UN-FAB FOUR are demanding royalties for copyright infringement.

Apparently, they own the rights to **circling the issue without ever landing on an answer.**

There's a lot to unpack in the bonus post-mortem, which is why I wrote today's Pre-Landing Protocol. I've put a lot of time into both pieces, and I'm sharing them freely because I want readers to get the full story. I'll be watching the readership count. If this piece hasn't reached enough readers yet, I may keep the bonus circling a little longer. Read this one first, and you'll see why the details in the next one matter when it lands.

SATIRE AND EVIDENCE NOTICE. "UN-FAB FOUR" and the "UN" nicknames are satirical labels. The doorstep exchange is paraphrased from a reported account. The City Hall exchange is my recollection. The emergency response, tower dialogue, royalty demand and penance joke are comic inventions. The party arrangement and ballot figures are hypothetical. This column makes no finding of ballot misuse, election fraud, an improper party arrangement or a conflict-of-interest breach. If anyone named disputes a factual statement, I invite them to identify the passage and share their account or relevant records. I'll review what they provide and correct any factual error I find.