THOROLD ELECTION COMMENTARY

They Won the UN-Votes. What About the Trust?

With 3 Satirical Illustrations

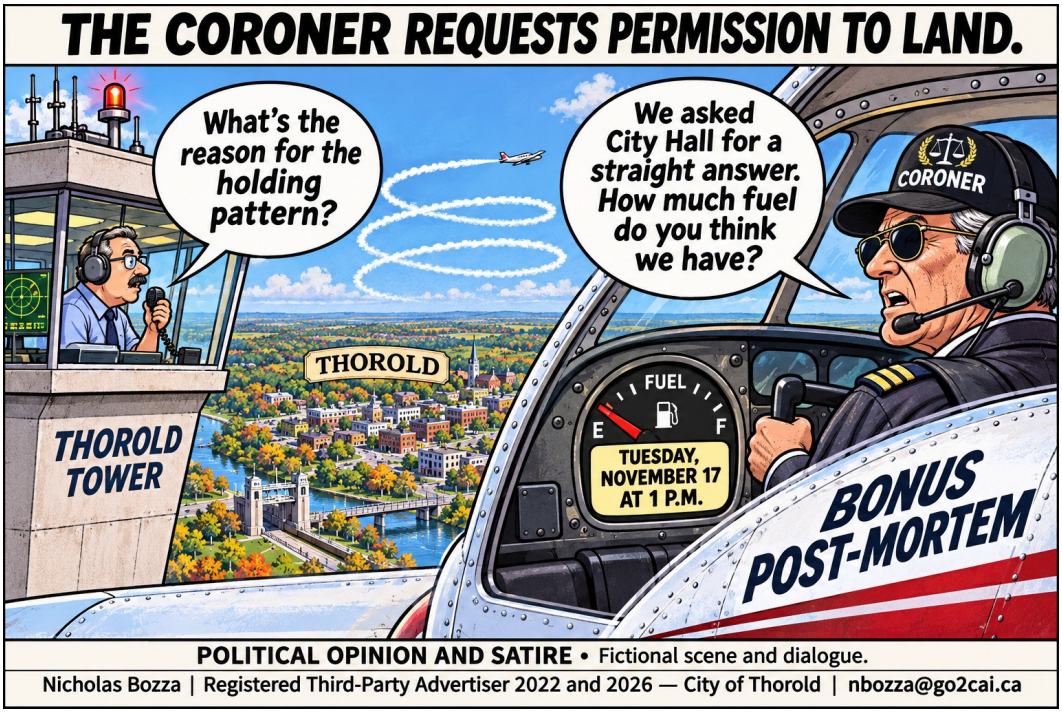
POLITICAL OPINION AND SATIRE • Illustrations, dialogue and motives are fictional.

Nicholas Bozza | Registered Third-Party Advertiser 2022 and 2026 — City of Thorold | nbozza@go2cai.ca

By Nicholas Bozza | Just over 3,000 words | Estimated reading time approx. 10 min — times may vary

BONUS POST-MORTEM LANDS TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 17 AT 1 P.M. — Swearing-in day. We've got just enough fuel to get there. If City Hall wants another delay, it'll have to send up a tanker.

MONDAY'S PREVIEW: A short setup article or a couple of satirical cartoons. Depends on whether the coroner finds room for words in the carry-on.



SATIRE • Fictional scene and dialogue. Imagined motives are not statements of fact.

The Coroner Has Us in a Holding Pattern

If you've been waiting for the bonus post-mortem, the plane is still circling Thorold. I held off on landing because the post-election comments raised a question worth dealing with first. All four councillors voters call the UN-FAB Four won another term. Some of the residents I heard from were still waiting for answers from the last one. **How do those two things happen in the same election?**

Today's article gives you the background for Tuesday's look at how all un-four won re-election. In the meantime, the local coroner is giving the post-mortem one final review. We've got enough gas to stay up in the air circling until 1 p.m. Tuesday, the same day council is sworn in. After that, we're landing. If City Hall asks why we circled for so long, tell them **we were waiting for a straight answer.**

The Way You Make Me Feel, City Hall Remix

Michael Jackson released “The Way You Make Me Feel” on November 9, 1987, exactly 39 years before I wrote this piece. I’m borrowing the title for the way some voters told me they felt after dealing with the UN-FAB FOUR. Their post-election comments are paraphrased here.

One recurring frustration was that there always seemed to be a reason something couldn’t be done. If responsibility could be passed along, the discussion shifted to whose fault it was. If a resident kept asking, the discussion could shift again, this time to why the resident wouldn’t let it go. Several of the comments came back to the same question. **Why does the person who points out the problem end up feeling like the problem?**

Some wondered whether a public statement would get a better hearing than a question. Others said they’d already explained what was bothering them and were tired of repeating themselves. When it takes that much effort to get an explanation, some residents decide they’ve got better things to do than spend another evening asking for one. At what point did asking a second question become a bad habit the UN-FAB FOUR had to train out of us?

Where Did Our Rights Go? Check the Lost and Found

Some residents put it to me this way. We had rights before the UN-FAB FOUR took over. In their words, those rights came from God. Where did they go? They were talking about the right to ask a question, be heard and get a straight answer about a decision made in their name. If councillors aren’t speaking for the people, who are they speaking for? When I threw that question back, residents asked who outside City Hall has the UN-FAB FOUR’s ear. I’d love to take credit for coming up with all this, but I was the sounding board. A glorified secretary with a keyboard and taxpayers who had plenty to say.

Asking the UN-FAB FOUR for more transparency is like turning up a three-way light bulb. **First click, dim. Second click, dimmer. Third click, total darkness.** Is there an electrician on staff at City Hall? Somebody should check that transparency switch. The performance so far has been shocking.

The UN-FAB Tendencies, Now Available in Self-Portrait Mode

When some voters use the word narcissistic, I hear a criticism of public behaviour. They’re talking about **who gets the credit, who gets heard and who takes responsibility**. Those are the tendencies I’m examining here. The examples below show what I would look for in public exchanges and in the council record.

Taking Credit Before the Ribbon Is Cut

My satire about Tim O’Hare taking credit for ideas plays on a familiar complaint. **Who did the work, and who gets the spotlight?** My Remembrance Day commentary on the reported video selfie involving Mike De Divitiis raised a related question about attention at a public event. In an imaginary City Hall gym, the trainer asks which machine gets the most use. The answer comes back without hesitation. The vending machine.

Please Hold Your Applause. We’re Still Expecting It.

Some residents felt they were expected to accept that an issue had been settled and move on. My question for councillors is whether a resident can politely challenge the explanation and still get a fair hearing. **Respect for the office ought to run both ways.**

Some voters asked how much of what comes before council is shaped here in Thorold. What ideas has O’Hare brought from Toronto, and how do they fit local needs? When a decision touches property interests, **what disclosures appear in the public record?** If a proposal echoes a provincial or party priority, who

brought it forward and what did Thorold taxpayers stand to gain? Those questions can be answered with records and an explanation from the councillor involved.

The Blame Has Been Forwarded to Another Department

Voters described exchanges where the conversation moved from the decision to the questioner's tone, persistence or reaction. It's fair for councillors to address how they're being spoken to. I still want to hear their answer to the original question, especially if they made the decision residents are asking about.

In the imaginary UN-FAB golf tournament, the foursome takes another shot. The scorekeeper asks whether that was a mulligan. **"An entitlement," comes the answer.**

Your Call Is Important. The On-Hold Music Is Proof.

Some residents felt that even after they explained how a decision affected them, the discussion carried on as though their experience had little bearing on it. A councillor can hear someone out and still vote the same way. I want to know what they heard, what weight they gave it and why.

Ken Sentance deserves a distinction here. **In my experience he returns calls, and quickly.** At the meet-and-greet he also said he stays on the line even when someone is upset enough to yell. I'll give him credit for picking up and calling back. I'm still checking whether staying on the line qualifies for a medal.

Full-Price Decisions, Half-Portion Answers

Several comments came back to the difference between saying information was available and explaining it in time for people to use it. Before a major commitment, can a taxpayer find out what Thorold would pay, what it would receive and what it could control? A document on a website can be the start of that answer.

Grijalva and colleagues found that people with higher narcissism scores were more likely to emerge as leaders. They found a different pattern for leadership effectiveness: more moderate scores were associated with better results than scores at either extreme. That distinction matters in Thorold. Winning another term tells us who got the votes. Others judge how well councillors did the job by what they did when residents asked them to account for their decisions. Grijalva et al., Narcissism and Leadership

Here's why some voters called the UN-FAB FOUR's conduct narcissistic. In the post-election accounts I heard, residents asked councillors to explain a decision and found themselves answering for their own tone, persistence or reaction. Canada Games Park puts that criticism to a concrete test. All four voted against seeking an outside legal opinion. What protections did each of you believe Thorold already had, and why did you consider them enough? **Residents should be able to ask that question without having to defend their right to ask it.**

A conclusion many have made is that the pattern residents described deserves to be called narcissistic conduct in office. The pattern is taking credit when things go well and turning scrutiny back on the people asking for answers when decisions are challenged. In the view of the voters who described it, **that puts image ahead of accountability.** Grijalva's research supports the distinction between winning a leadership role and performing it well. The voters I heard from were blunt and incisive in their criticism of the UN-FAB FOUR. They said that when they asked councillors to explain their decisions, they ended up having to defend why they asked.

Misdirection and the Municipal Shell Game

When voters wanted council to explain its Canada Games Park decision, I watched the debate turn to issues like remote meeting attendance and the cemetery. What stuck with me was how often the conversation turned to Jim Handley for asking the questions. **Voters wanted answers about the decision.** Who helped shape the approach Mayor Ugulini and the four took on Canada Games Park? If the advice came from outside council, who gave it and what did it recommend? More on the bonus post mortem article on Tuesday before 1pm.

What Residents Called UN-FAB Abusive with less and less patience:

Some of the post-election comments were blunt. Residents described what they saw as a pattern: ask why something went wrong and the blame goes elsewhere without explanation. Ask again and suddenly your tone, your persistence or your reaction is the issue. Some used the word abusive for how they felt treated. Their complaint was that they had to defend their right to ask a question before anyone would deal with the question itself.

VOTER COMMENTS:

BEFORE THEY'RE REFERRED BACK TO THE VOTERS (MANY CALLED THESE ACTS NARCISSISTIC TENDENCIES)

Some of the UN-FOUR councillors may think Thorold taxpayers will swallow any answer said many. The people who spoke to me had already figured out where the explanations fell short. They were tired of trying to get heard, and some told me they'd lost faith in speaking up and many didn't vote. These are their comments, paraphrased. PLEASE NOTE I CLEANED UP THE LANGUAGE TO BE MUCH MORE POLITE.

- If they can blame somebody else, they do. If they can't, suddenly there's no problem and the announcement is that what voters see as not working is a great success. The person pointing it out becomes the nuisance.
- I asked about your decision. **You answered with a complaint about my reaction.** I'm still waiting for an answer about your decision.
- We told you how it affected us. Then it happened again. How many times are taxpayers expected to come back and explain why the same treatment is unacceptable?
- If the information was supposedly available all along, why did taxpayers have to find it themselves? Leaving out a fact that changes the whole decision can leave people with a false impression. Tell us what we were told, when we were told and what was missing.
- Aren't lies of omission still lies?
- We shouldn't have to beg for your attention. **Four more years in office doesn't buy four more years of our trust.**
- People walk away because they can't teach you a lesson. Your behaviour already taught them something.
- Isn't lack of accountability the largest red flag in any type of relationship?
- If they wanted to properly explain why they did, they would do it on their own. If they wanted to apologize, they would do it. Stop waiting for the answer, their behaviour already shows you.
- If they get defensive every time you start asking questions, they're not trying to hear you, they're just really trying to stop talking. All because your questions makes it harder for them to keep pretending that nothing happened and there are no issues.
- When the same behavior keeps happening, after we tell them how it affects taxpayers. They've put their desires above taxpayers. That's why people don't vote. So maybe some elections were predetermined? Was this all part of the plan?
- We won't apologise for being mistreated
- Why should we understand that you don't like questions when it changes how we see you?

Here's my question for each of the four. Which of those complaints do you think is unfair? Pick one, show residents the exchange or the record and give them the answer you think they missed. If you got something wrong, say so plainly. **Taxpayers shouldn't need a second election campaign to get a first straight answer.**

When the Room Goes Quiet, Put "Unanimous" in the Minutes

Some residents said they thought twice about speaking again because they expected to be treated as the problem. Others said they were done waiting for an explanation that, in their view, councillors would have offered on their own if they wanted to give it. That withdrawal has a cost. Council can look out at a quieter

room and call it agreement. The people who stopped coming may have reached the opposite conclusion and hence they stopped voting I'm told.

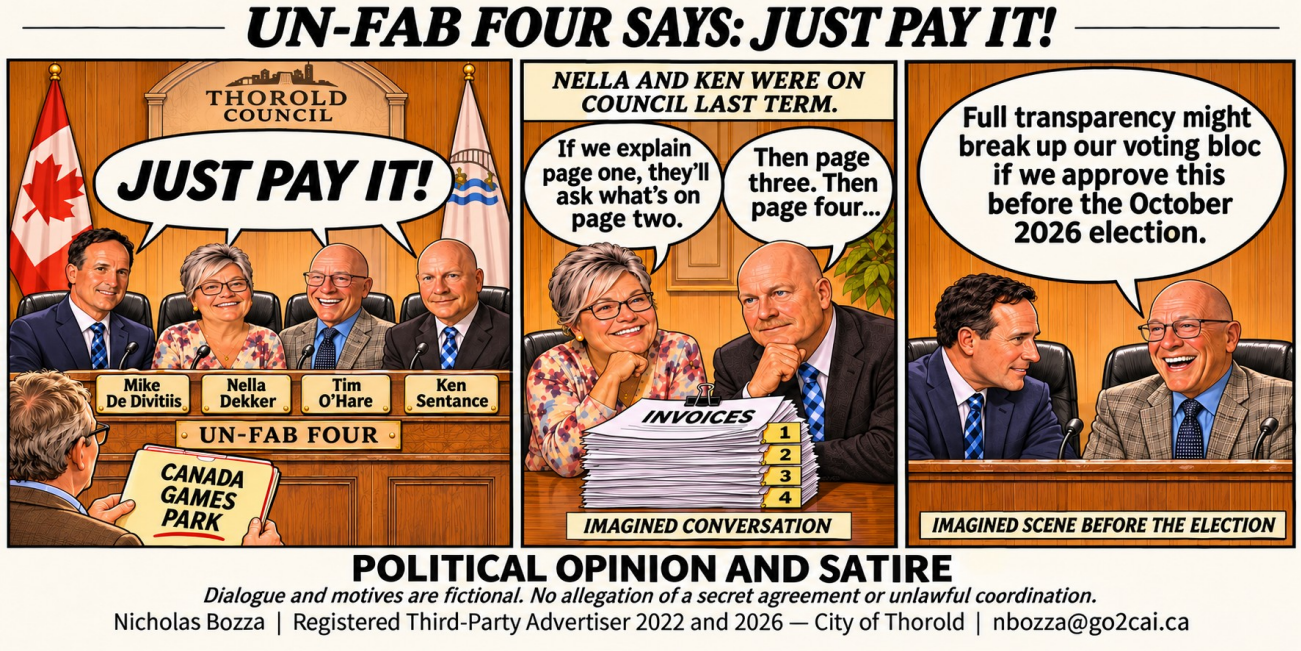
Canada Games Park and the Five-Story Wall of No

On October 3, 2023, Jim Handley moved that Thorold seek an outside legal opinion on the Canada Summer Games lease agreement. **The motion went down 5–4.** Mayor Terry Ugulini and councillors Nella Dekker, Ken Sentance, Tim O'Hare and Mike De Divitiis voted against it. Anthony Longo, Henry D'Angela, Carmen DeRose and Handley voted in favour.

O'Hare argued that the city had already relied on municipal lawyers and questioned the expense of getting more advice. Dekker said she felt bullied and harassed by the issue repeatedly coming back. Both reactions are part of the public account. I'm sure the UN-FAB FOUR checks their monthly bills if they are correct but Thorold taxpayers shouldn't?

I'll bet the UN-FAB FOUR would check their monthly bills if a charge looked off. At home, that's called balancing the chequebook. **At City Hall, apparently, it's called bringing up Canada Games Park again.**

Here's what I'd still ask each of the four. What protections did you understand Thorold already had, and why did you consider those protections sufficient without the outside review proposed in the motion?



SATIRE • Fictional scene and dialogue. Imagined motives are not statements of fact.

Continued on page 6

The Four-Year Job Interview, With the Taxpayers Asking the Questions

What gets praised	What voters can ask
Making hard decisions	Who had to live with the decision? Did council hear them and explain why it voted as it did?
Managing stakeholders	Did residents get the material facts early enough to ask questions and form their own views?
Executive presence	Do the answers hold up when someone asks for the numbers, the minutes or the reasons behind a vote?
Being results-driven	What did Thorold gain, what did it commit to, and who bears the cost if projections are wrong?

My shortlist for judging local leaders is just as practical. Can they build healthy relationships, work as a team, stay composed under criticism, make themselves approachable, are they open minded(?), think critically, come prepared and understand the financial implications of their votes?

What Did NDP MPP Jeff Burch See in Nella Dekker? Was he asking to shape Thorold?:

Niagara Centre NDP MPP Jeff Burch's endorsement of Nella Dekker deserves a closer look. Some voters took his support for Dekker as a wider sign of approval for the UN-FAB FOUR. I saw our local federal MP Fred Davies stay out of the council race with an announcement to do so. Why did our local MPP choose to get involved? **What in Dekker's record earned his support, and what priorities did he hope to see advanced at our City Hall?** All fair questions.

From my involvement in municipal elections, I've seen how much federal and provincial parties spend on campaign coaching to win an election. More than all city candidates combined I'd say. An independent candidate can't match those resources. Did Burch's involvement stop at a public endorsement, or did it include other campaign support? If there was more support, voters say they deserve to know what it was. The intellectual info Jeff Burtch have ready to go for the next provincial election for Thorold cost tens of thousands of dollars if not more. **Voters are asking if Nella and the other UN-FAB FOUR benefit from these resources?**

Burch's endorsement is where the political left enters this Thorold story says Thorold tax payers. He backed Dekker directly. Some voters saw that as indirect support for all UN-four because she stood with the other three on votes such as Canada Games Park and most of the four endorsed each other in one way or another it seemed to protect their majority vote. That connection is why I was asked by voters to bring the research on political identity and mental health into Exhibit A. The study concerns reported mental health disorders in a specific left party politics ideology population. The local political question is becoming more ramped being: **which parts of the four councilors' shared record Burch was prepared to stand behind.**

Exhibit A | Political Ideology and Mental Health, With the Armchairs Removed

Here's the connection I was asked to make if there was a co-relation or not by voters. The endorsement came from the political left. Niagara Centre NDP MPP Jeff Burch backed Nella Dekker directly, and some Thorold voters read that as indirect support for the UN-FAB FOUR. They pointed to votes where Dekker

stood with the other three, including the decision against seeking an outside legal opinion on Canada Games Park. Burch put his name behind one candidate-if not more. Those voters wanted to know how much of the un-four councillors' shared record he was willing to put his name behind.

That brings voters to the research question about the political left and mental health. In one U.S. study, self-reported mental health disorders rose most sharply among those who endorsed Liberalism which includes NDP party politics as the same ideologies. It's a finding worth discussing on its own terms. The study did not report that some people are easily persuaded or worn down by a campaign or how certain UN-FAB types treat taxpayers but that would require more research. Nor did it assess the mental health of Ontario NDP supporters but Thorold voters questioned what conclusions could lend itself to the Thorold results. I tell you anyone who says Thorold people aren't bright needs to have their heads examined.

Some voters I heard from wondered whether Jeff Burch's endorsement gave Nella Dekker an advantage with voters who already trusted him or the NDP, and whether that trust carried over to the other three. That's a possibility worth testing. The mental-health research raises a separate question about whether people respond differently to political messages. The studies discussed here measured mental-health outcomes, so they can't tell us who was persuaded or how anyone voted in Thorold. The strongest version of the local argument is this: **Burch endorsed one candidate, but some voters may have heard an endorsement of four.**

Some voters asked whether the reported 2.5-times difference in mental-health outcomes could help explain Thorold's result. The first question is what the paper actually measured and whom it compared. Even if the figure holds for the population studied, applying it to Ontario NDP voters would require evidence about those voters. To connect it to Thorold's election, we'd also need evidence that Burch's endorsement changed enough ballots to affect who won a seat.

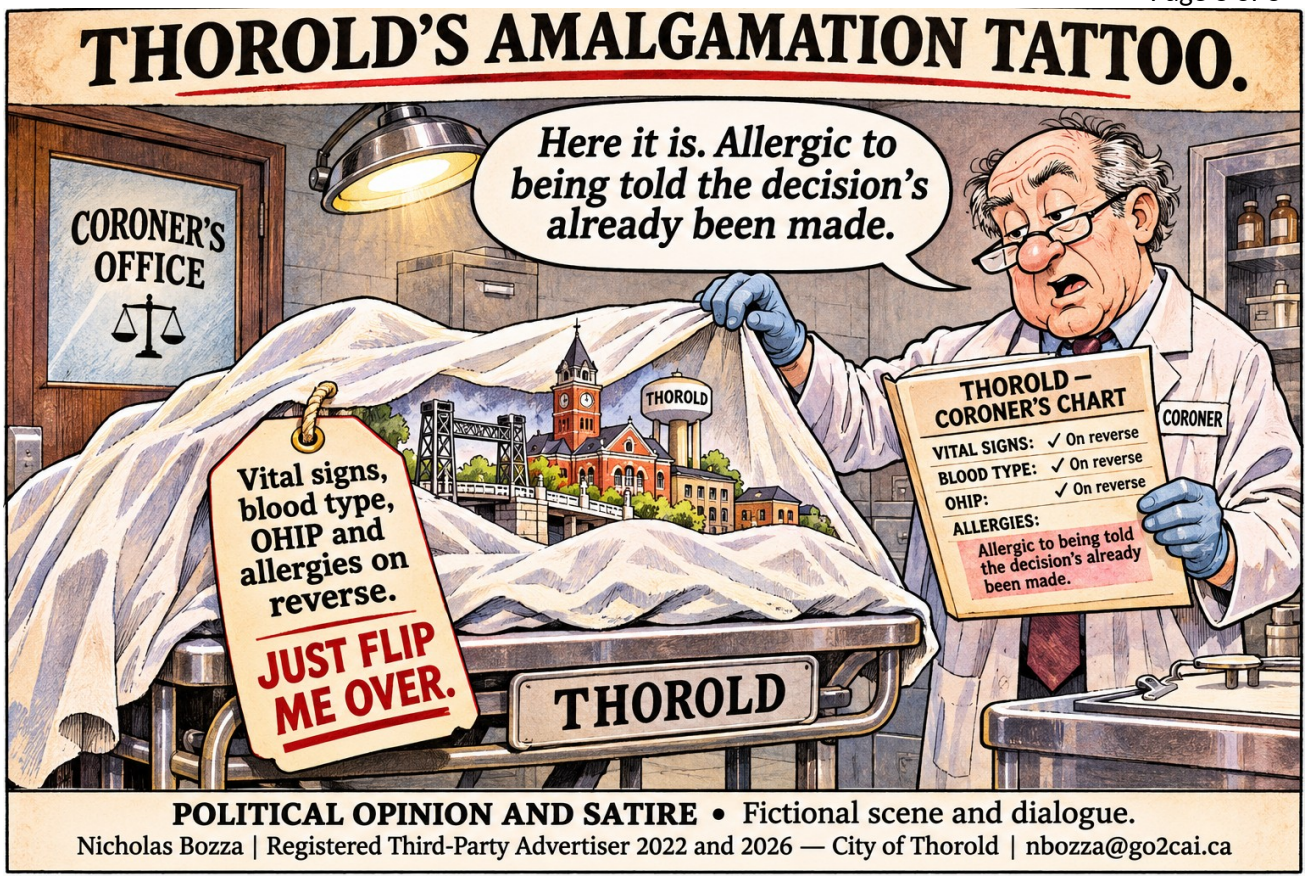
It's like asking about speeding on a highway. Knowing that some drivers speed doesn't tell you by how much, how often, or whether it increased the collision rate on that stretch of road. In Thorold, the question is how many voters changed their choices because of the endorsement, and was that enough to change who got elected? Ontario has no mental-health eligibility threshold- which is interesting within itself -more later.. **An otherwise eligible resident's ballot is legal regardless of diagnosis.**

The four councilors can answer the local question themselves. Why did you vote the way you did, and what did you expect those decisions to accomplish for Thorold?

The possibility I want readers to consider is that Burch brought an existing NDP base into a municipal race. His endorsement may have helped Dekker with voters who already trusted the party, and some may have extended that trust to the other three. That's worth looking into. Evidence about who saw the endorsement and how it affected their choices would tell us more about Thorold's result.

Thorold's Amalgamation Tattoo Comes With Flipping Instructions

In the cartoon version, Thorold is on the coroner's table, naked, flat on its back, and its soul has already been forwarded to Amalgamation. I'd put the handover notes on a tattoo: vital signs, blood type, OHIP card number, SIN and allergies. Allergy: being told the decision has already been made. The tattoo ends with instructions for whoever inherits the file. **"JUST FLIP ME OVER."**



SATIRE • Fictional scene and dialogue. Imagined motives are not statements of fact.

NEXT UP | TUESDAY AT 1 P.M. | FOUR WON, THE PLANE LANDS

On swearing-in day, I'll turn to how the four won another term. Keep today's question in mind when the plane lands. What did it take to win the votes, and what will it take to earn the trust of residents still waiting for answers? A cartoon may land Monday if the coroner clears it for takeoff.

Sources, Because the Receipts Should Be Easier to Find Than the Answers

The October 3, 2023 council minutes record the motion on the Canada Summer Games lease agreement. ThoroldToday's October 4 coverage reports the recorded vote and the comments by O'Hare and Dekker.

City of Thorold council minutes, October 3, 2023, item 14.1

ThoroldToday coverage of the Canada Games Park vote

Grijalva et al., Narcissism and Leadership, Personnel Psychology (2015)

Gimbrone et al., The Politics of Depression (2022)

POLITICAL OPINION AND SATIRE

UN-FAB Four is a satirical label. This article contains political opinion, paraphrased voter comments and references to public council records. The illustrations depict fictional scenes, dialogue and motives. They make no allegation of concealed invoices, secret agreements, unlawful coordination or other misconduct. Comments on public conduct are not clinical diagnoses. The plane, coroner and amalgamation scenes are fictional.