

Presentation – Governance and Priorities Committee
Monday January 18, 2021

My name is Robert Clipperton. I am speaking today in my role as the Civics Coordinator for the Nutana Community Association.

Congratulations to Councillor Kirton on his new position and congratulations to the rest who for the most part were re-elected by large margins. I think this reflects the feeling of the majority of residents in Saskatoon that we indeed have good civic government.

I am aware that a report on the November 2020 Civic Election is in preparation with a target completion date of March of this year. I want to speak with you regarding that process. What I will say today reflects hundreds of personal conversations with voters as to their experience with the electoral process.

The civic election in Saskatoon was conducted within the context of two almost unique circumstances: the Covid-19 epidemic and a major snow storm on election day. It is recognized that these presented challenges and that elections staff had a difficult task before them.

The voter turn-out however was the lowest in decades at just over 27% despite a hotly contested race for Mayor and contests in 9 of 10 wards. I think we would all agree it is in everyone's best interest to be sure that people are encouraged to vote and that the City make this as easy as possible while maintaining the integrity of the process. I am not here to lay blame but I do feel that there are things that need correction so that there is a better voter experience in 2024. To name a few:

- **Mail in ballots:**
 - according to the press 4,479 or (26%) out of approximately 17,000 requests were denied – there must be a problem with the process if this many applications were completed incorrectly.
 - I talked to people who didn't know why their application was rejected. Their 'rejection' e-mail read: "Your application has

been rejected for failure to submit one or more of the required following items.”

- a person on our Board said that although she had applied for her ballot at the earliest opportunity, she only received it after the recommended last date for mailing
- instructions on the ballot said ‘not to fold’ but for mail-ins, the ballot needed to be folded to be put in the envelope
- a person sent me screen shots showing that the information regarding the ‘vouching’ process changed from what was first published to what was finally on the City’s website.
 - At first the public was told that an elector could only witness the form of one person outside of a family member living with them; later the rule was changed to unlimited witnessing
- the original drop off site for ballots was at a location near the Airport that was not easy to get to for those without a vehicle
 - when additional locations were opened up, all of them were outside of Circle Drive
 - after complaints were aired a drop off was announced for City Hall – one person who was concerned about COVID told me he was unwilling to enter the lobby to drop off his ballot and that is why he had requested a mail-in in the first place
 - in the end, on Friday the 13th, ballots could be dropped off at any polling place
- **Advance Polls**
 - these were held on 7 different days and no two days were the same. This caused confusion with some voters going to a polling place only to find that it wasn’t open:

- for example hours at City Hall were from 11 to 7, 10 to 5, 11 to 6, 11 to 6, and 11 to 7
 - mall locations were open on the Friday and Saturday but not the Sunday and then again on the Wednesday and Thursday, but not with consistent hours
 - I spoke to people who went to mall locations to vote, took a look at the long line-ups and went back home
 - I had a call from a woman who had been waiting at the drive through location in her car for two hours and thought she would be in line for at least two more.
- **Other:**
 - two people told me that the processes in place were not sufficient to accommodate their disabilities
 - There reports of some voters who refused to wear masks when in line. This was intimidating for some others
 - I received two reports of people being given a ballot to vote for the Catholic School Board – an issue with muffled voices due to masks? This is indicative of a process problem.
 - I had a text at 7:25 pm on Friday the 13th. A man was standing in front of Nutana Collegiate and thought his polling place was supposed to be there. Fortunately there was still time for him to go down to City Hall before the poll closed.

Considering some of the problems that presented, almost all of the winners were by margins large enough that there have been few if any allegations of voter suppression affecting the outcome of any of the races. Imagine how loud the criticisms would have been if we had had multiple races decided by only handfuls of votes.

So we would like to see that any review of the November 2020 civic election include:

1) That the recommendations from the report on the 2016 election be reviewed. How many of these were implemented? How many of these weren't implemented but perhaps in retrospect should have been?

2) That input be requested from experts outside of Saskatoon who have expertise in running elections. These could come from other cities or Elections Saskatchewan perhaps.

3) That measures be put in place to allow for public engagement so that the nature and extent of the problems such as I have enumerated can be determined.

To sum up, lets have a through review and let's give the public a chance to share their stories with the goal of improving the system so that next time, no one finds voting to be too difficult to actually cast their ballot.