

Your chance to complain

BY BRIAN LOCKHART

With province-wide municipal elections coming up in October, the rhetoric has begun and with it the long list of things people feel the need to disparage.

Yes, it's your chance to complain and point out everything you don't like about where you live.

From that stop sign at the end of the street that serves no real purpose to a burnt out street light that is causing your neighbor to stand on his porch and shake his fist and curse the powers that be for their incompetence, complaining about the way things are run is pretty much a national past-time.

However, when you look at the big picture and cast aside the few irritating things about the town that just tick you off, you soon realize how well Canadian cities and towns are run.

For the most part, the average person doesn't understand the entire process of how government runs at the federal level.

You can read the headlines that the government is spending \$50 million on a new study to determine why bananas are curved, or the budget for defence will provide an additional amount for the procurement of new recruits.

Occasionally you see a story that the feds are giving several million dollars to a country in Africa to provide safe drinking water in a village no one has every heard of and of course a good deal of it will be siphoned off as tax by local authorities and warlords.

However, speak to the average person and no one really understands the entire budget and how the government collects funds and where all the money goes.

Unless you've got some time and sit down with some high level accountants who control the books, most of us are just guessing and following news stories without actually knowing what goes on at Parliament Hill.

It's the same with the province. We know Queen's Park is in control of provincial matters like education and health care, but has anyone ever sent you a detailed plan of money raised and spent?

When it comes to municipal government, the plan, the action, and the results are directly apparent, and any breakdown in the system will affect you directly.

While the mayor and council make decisions during their tenure in office, the town itself is run by managers and employees who are hired for their specific skills and do a very good job.

A breakdown in services at the municipal level has an immediate impact that is a lot more severe and noticeable than if the federal government goofs up.

Have you ever had a day when the garbage wasn't picked up because they forgot to do it? If a streetlight does burn out, you can bet it will be replaced in a reasonable amount of time.

Have you ever head of the fire department not showing up when called because they were busy doing other things?

When it comes to plowing the streets after a snowfall, you've always got the one complainer who gripes because his street hasn't been taken care of. However they neglect to realize that clearing all the streets isn't a 10-minute job and after starting with the main thoroughfares, they will indeed get to your cul de sac.

Yes, things do break down, potholes open up on the roads during the spring and once in a blue moon a traffic light burns out. People like to complain about such annoyances but rarely do they take note when it is fixed.

Orangeville director of public works, Doug Jones, confirmed there are municipal standards set by the province for road care, and in Orangeville, his crews routinely patrol each road and street on a weekly basis just to look for potholes, damaged signs, and burnt out lights.

The streets in Orangeville are clean and the parks well maintained.

There are plenty of cities across the globe that don't have potable drinking water, garbage pickup is non existent, and fixing a pothole isn't necessary because they still haven't paved the roads.

I recall watching a news item about a fairly large city in Missouri where a new council had been elected and the streets were littered with garbage. The mayor's response was 'garbage pickup is not a municipal issue.'

While the issues that will be debated and acted on by the council that is voted into power this October, are of course important, take a few minutes to look around and notice what a vibrant well run town you are lucky enough to call home.