



## Council Restricts Political Signs on Public Spaces



Last week, Quesnel City Council voted in the majority to restrict political signs on public space within the city limits to six, double-sided signs per candidate or initiative. This limitation will apply to all political campaigns: municipal, school board, provincial, federal, and to referendums. As far as I know, we are the first local government to restrict political signage to this degree.

This initiative is an outcome of Council's review and enforcement of our current sign bylaw and is a fundamental part of our ongoing beautification efforts. As I noted in a previous column, when we reviewed our sign bylaw it became evident that there was a gross unfairness inherent in the current bylaw in that every class of person, business, or not for profit is significantly restricted in their use of public spaces for signage except political candidates, who could litter our public space with their signs during the campaign period with very few restrictions.

On top of this fundamental unfairness, Council, in the majority, felt that unrestricted political signage on public space was not only an unnecessary eyesore, it is also a waste of resources and it builds inequity into our political campaigns, as better funded campaigns can litter our public spaces with more and more signs during the course of an election independent of whether or not they have growing public support. The majority of Council also believed that restricting access to public spaces for political signage will force candidates to connect with voters by other means, including getting permission to put signs up on private property (which will only have size restrictions imposed).

During Council's consultation on this initiative the general public overwhelmingly supported restricting the number, size, and duration of political signage on public spaces. Political bodies, parties, and organizations were also directly consulted on this matter and we did not receive any clear feedback from these organizations. For example, the School Board was divided on the matter with 3 Trustees opposed to it, three neutral, and one in favor.

One criticism we've received as we've undertaken this initiative is that we should be focused on other, more important, matters. The short response to this critique is: we are. Council didn't down tools to focus all our energy or staff's time on this particular bylaw, we continue to work on multiple fronts to ensure our community will thrive during this transition period.

As anyone who moved about the City this summer saw, we have made massive investments in our infrastructure and have the plans and the financial means to continue this work because of the financial restructuring and tax framework Council undertook in our first two budgets of this term. We have rebuilt the playground in West Fraser Timber Park and plan on building new playgrounds in Southills and in LeBourdais Park next year as part of a new five-year capital plan for all our playgrounds. We are also continuing with our rebranding initiative and will be launching a new website next year; the combination of a new brand and a new website will fundamentally reposition the City on the Internet and enable us to better attract and retain residents and investment.

In short, our new political sign bylaw is merely one small initiative in our significant and diverse efforts to reposition our community as a progressive and interesting place to visit, live, work, and invest in.

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