

# Reforming Open House Sign Bylaw

## Section 5.4.4 (b) of Procedure By-law

Wednesday, September 13, 2023

In the previous term, the Open House Sign Bylaw was discussed SIX TIMES! In fact, no other item has ever been discussed that many times during that term. That alone makes this item very controversial.

What has made this item so important for the council that made them spending that much of their very valuable time and resources on that? And what was the outcome of six times discussing it? All we know is that: if the issue was fixed, we wouldn't discuss it today again.

The intention of this letter is not to blame the previous council, but to support a permanent solution for the on-going issue. The council passed different bylaws including a wide range of restrictions for the Open House Sign Bylaw, however the outcomes showed they failed one after another. That's why what Councillor Scott Thompson is bringing forward today is absolutely essential and can be a permanent solution to many failed attempts in the past.

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In essence, the current Open House Sign Bylaw is not restricting the sign, but it is banning it. Nowhere in Ontario or Canada has such biased bylaw. This bylaw is experimental and of course against the conformity of running business in the open market of this country. The current bylaw sounds like a "punishment" rather than a solution.

A good bylaw should have at least 3 qualifications:

- Being fair
- Being practical
- Protect the best interests of the residents.

The current bylaw has none of these.

**Fairness:** It is not fair to the residents who decide to market their homes – which is the most precious asset they have - to the best of their abilities, as it fully restricts them from hosting an open house. Keep in mind that almost every one of us one day will be that seller. Also, it is not fair to the small business owners – realtors in this case – to run their businesses properly, and protect the best interest of their clients as they are obligated to.

**Practicality:** It is not practical, as since the bylaw came into place, the level of violations and sign pollution have increased rapidly. It simply does not work, as it does not offer a practical solution. Generally, with only one sign, it is impossible to direct people to the open house. Common sense.

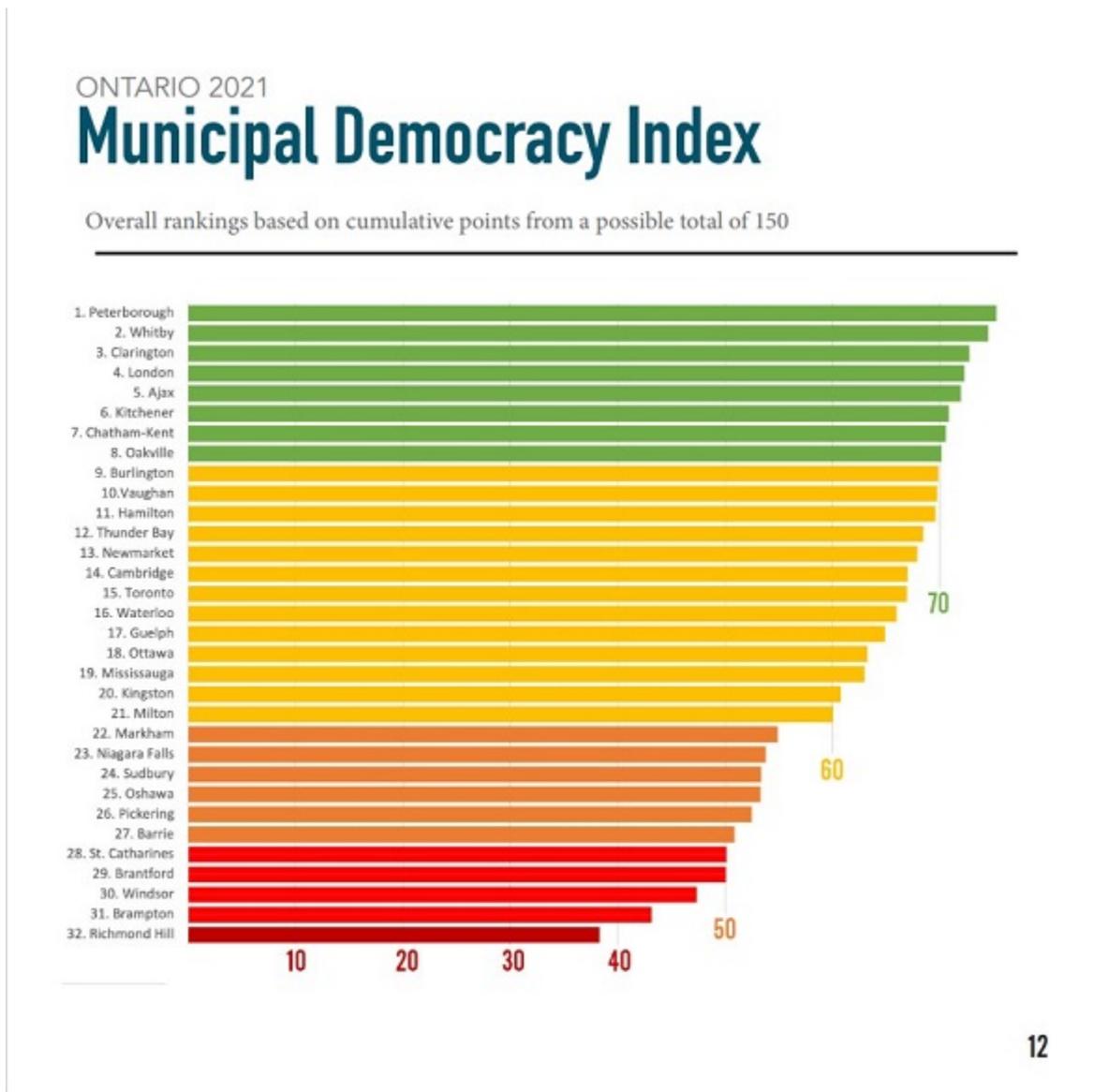
**Protecting the Interest:** It does not protect the best interests of the residents, as it does not allow them to use every tool possible to market the most important assets they have – their homes. How does the current bylaw protect the best interest of our seniors, veterans, the people in need? How does it help the residents in this tough economy?

Because of these three reasons, no other municipality in Canada has ever followed Richmond Hill's footsteps in terms of open house sign bylaw.

**Free Enterprise:** The current bylaw is against the core value of the free enterprise system that we have in this country. Governments have the duty to promote the businesses, not distracting them. The fact that we see an increase in sign violations, sign pollution, ongoing argument/discussion in the level of Municipality/Region and media, all these reasons are wake-up calls for reforming the current bylaw.

**Human Rights:** The current bylaw violates our fundamental human rights of free expression to promote & advertise the residents' businesses in an appropriate manner. We need to remember that in the Municipal Democracy Index (2021), at the time the council passed the current Open House Sign Bylaw, Richmond Hill ranked #32 out of 32 municipalities in Ontario! Are we going to continue to be the "LAST MUNICIPALITY" in human rights, or try to improve ourselves in terms of human rights? The choice is ours.

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**Canadian Values:** The bylaw creates division in our community as it creates obstacles for the residents who want to sell their homes (almost every homeowner will be a seller one day) and the local small business

owners. It creates conflict that leads to division between the city and the residents. It is against what Canada is all about. We need more unity not division.

**Sign Pollution:** Open house signs cannot be compared to the contractor's signs like roofers, lawn mowers, etc. Unlike contractors, the open house signs represent the business of the residents who are in the immediate need of selling. Restricting their rights will have a direct negative impact on the residents. Here is one example: a letter from a long-time resident of Richmond Hill that sent to the city Bylaw on May 27, 2022:

*"Hello,*

*I had difficulty selling my house, because my agents couldn't bring traffic to my open houses on the weekends. They told me that they are not allowed to install more than ONE DIRECTIONAL SIGN on the road! If this is the case, how does this by-law help seniors and homeowners in Richmond Hill to sell their homes with the best prices? My home is the most important asset I have, and I have the right to market it as well as possible.*

*I am a senior and a long-time resident of Richmond Hill, and I have all the rights to advertise my house to the best and fullest. Unfortunately, the restrictive current by-law does not allow that. Please change the sign bylaw that it's hurting many local seniors like myself. Thank you for your attention to this matter, Gerry Carlin"*

This email speaks volumes. This is exactly what I hear from our senior residents every day.

\* \* \*

I personally disagree with lifting the restriction completely, as it will cause more sign pollution. On the other hand, continuing with the current bylaw will cause more sign pollution as well. The council should find a middle ground to protect the best interests of the residents and at the same time, offer an enforceable bylaw to keep our beautiful city clean. That's why Councillor Thompson's motion is very important as it offers a balanced permanent solution to the issue.

The only correction I would like to mention is the **height of the sign**, which is 0.6 meters above the ground. The appropriate height should be 1.0 meter (like election signs) as the sign itself is 0.6 meter (2 feet) and needs to little post to be installed (sign + post = height).

I, as a long-time resident of Richmond Hill, fully support Councillor's Thompson motion and I hope the council members support that too.

Thank you for your time and attention,

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