

students must decide

Every time you turn around there seems to be an election approaching on one front or another. This time it's the Halifax Municipal Election and it should be a good battle. The incredibly shoddy performance of the present council and the new wave citizen action and participation promises to make this campaign a tough and exciting one.

Generally newspapers withhold their election editorials until shortly before the people are called to the polls but we'd like to get a few words in early to encourage students to vote while there is still plenty of time to check the issues and judge the candidates.

A lot of people (students included) seem to think that it is not necessary for students to participate in the municipal elections. We do not share this viewpoint, for what we feel are several good reasons.

The only real issues in this election are Development and Planning. These are two problems that significantly affect the conditions under which students will live and study for the next few years. The claim that students are more transient than other residents is not always true particularly in the case of Dalhousie where a large proportion of the student body come from the Halifax-Dartmouth area. In any case excluding those who were born and grew up here and those who after graduation will find work and make their homes here your average student is still a resident of Halifax from anywhere from three to seven years. We don't think that's all that bad an average for any young urban resident in these times.

Students more so than others tend to live in the downtown area of Halifax. A lot of people appreciate the difficulty of working and commuting in and to the heart of the city, but students have the additional problems of living here.

The transit systems in Halifax are a mess as anyone who has shivered on a snowy street corner waiting for the illusive 9a bus will be quick to tell you. Traffic problems which are difficult now, will be intolerable in the next year if some serious thought is not quickly given to the planning and restriction of impending development. The quality of the roads themselves and particularly the sidewalks are notoriously poor. I doubt if there is a pedestrian in Halifax sufficiently agile to continually negotiate those bumpy concrete walkways without incurring at least a minor injury.

Students, as residents of downtown Halifax, have a vested interest in how municipal funds are spent. As tenants most of us pay our fair share of property taxes and we have the right to influence how they are spent. Students must take the initiative in calling for priorities on citizen oriented programs. If you want a city properly planned with a good balance of recreational facilities and parkland areas along with interesting and contemporary commercial developments the time to act is now.

If you want some work done on the Housing problem in Halifax if you would like to see new developments provide some housing and facilities for students and other low income segments of population, then you had better scrutinise the candidates carefully.

It is in the best interests of the City of Halifax to have those who will bear the consequences of municipal action, participate in local decision making. This can lead only to more satisfactory decisions and improved conditions of urban life.

Halifax city council has never seemed to accept this principle with any great consistency. On the odd occasion council has moved to act in the interests or on the demands of a particular citizen or group of citizens, but this privilege is usually reserved for citizens of substantial political or financial status. City Councils disregard of citizen protest is at times unexplainable, one can never decide whether to attribute it to callous self-interest or blatant stupidity.

Audrey Stewart in an article on the Quinpool Road Controversy in City Magazine sums up the frustration aptly. "Little can be said about the ten-member council to give a clear understanding of why they function the way they do" Stewart after excusing two members of Council Dave MacKeen and Lou Moir goes on to say "The remaining eight range from long time homeowners from the oldest Halifax families to up and coming real estate brokers and insurance agents starting out on that long political road in hopes of being future Mayors or Premiers. While they may argue for several hours over granting permission to an individual for an addition to a house on an undersize lot, they seldom reflect for as many minutes over encouraging one developer or another to annihilate a block or two of housing. As to whether this is clear that Council functions on the old axioms of reducing property tax by expanding development, etc. In short it is the kind of Council that cries out to be replaced."

Cries out indeed, there is little doubt that Quinpool Road residents have heard that call and Dalhousie students sans Athletic Complex have heard it as well. The GAZETTE believes that the wants and needs of the majority of Halifax Citizens have been consistently ignored by Halifax's Mayor and Alderpersons.

If Dalhousie students are prepared to accept their responsibility of participation and involvement in local decision-making. Their first move should be to elect a council that is sympathetic to the needs of all the people.

Make that move on October 16th, VOTE for a candidate who will listen.

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