

Over the Back Fence
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Approx 660 words

The bumpy road to democracy
By Alva Wood

We voted on Tuesday. Well, most of us voted. A few didn't persevere enough to overcome all the hurdles blocking the polling booths in the community hall.

A long time ago, the village's engineering department decided that we had to have a roundabout somewhere in our street system, because we didn't want to get left behind by all the other communities that were replacing their traffic lights with roundabouts. We didn't have any traffic lights to replace, but that was beside the point, we had to have a roundabout.

Road construction always takes longer than anyone planned. Certainly no one planned to have the roundabout paved on Election Day.

Some people claim that no one in the engineering department plans anything farther ahead than the next donut break.

On Election Day, the paving machines and lots of trucks loaded with asphalt arrived from River City.

"Do you have to pave it today?" protests chief engineer Freddie Fallis. "Why not tomorrow?"

"Because by tomorrow, the asphalt in those trucks will solidify," replies the foreman.

So they paved.

And people trying to vote ran into a forest of "Road Closed" signs.

The good thing about roundabouts is that all roads connect to the same traffic circle. The bad thing about roundabouts is that all roads connect to the same traffic circle.

If the roundabout is closed, so are all the connecting roads.

You couldn't get to the hall along Main Street. Or along Hill Street. Or along New Hill Street. Or even along Bottom Hill Street, unless you drove all the way back out the highway to the outskirts of the village and came back by the road along the creek.

And then you discovered that hall caretaker Hiram Walker had had closed the gate to the parking area to prevent people from parking on the grass and ruining his lawn.

He hung up a sign, "No parking in front of the gate."

So when Eleanor Frost drove down from her retreat centre, back in the bush, she parked in front of the "Road Closed" sign instead.

When Dunc McMahon came along Bottom Hill Street, he couldn't see the "Road Closed" sign and drove around Eleanor's car to find a place to park, and his truck sank up to its axles in hot asphalt.

The paving crew was not impressed.

Yvonne Wentz had been fielding Freddie Fallis's frantic phone calls at the village offices, so she knew what kind of mess was out there. She didn't even try to vote.

Veejay Ramcharan only lived a block away, so he walked to the hall. But the roads still caused him problems.

Veejay handed in his voting card.

"I'll need to see photo ID as well," says the officer.

Veejay hands over his drivers' licence.

The officer looks at the licence. "I have to ask you where you live," she says dubiously.

"Same place as the last election," says Sam.

"No you don't," retorts the officer. "Your licence says you live on Main Street, but the voting card says you live on Hill Street."

"I didn't move," says Veejay. "They renamed my street so they could get a grant from the provincial government." He sees Mayor Jake Bowers coming in. "Hey, Jake!" he calls, "come and explain to this lady about your street names."

Jake dutifully explains.

“And you are?” asks the lady.

Jake explains that too.

“I’ll need two pieces of ID from you as a guarantor,” she says to Jake. And to Veejay, “You’ll need a second guarantor before I can let you vote.”

Martha Brokenwind almost didn’t get to vote at all.

The officer asks for her driver’s licence. Martha doesn’t drive.

“How about credit cards?”

She doesn’t believe in credit.

“A passport? A citizenship card?”

“I’m First Nations,” Martha retorts proudly. “I don’t need those things.”

She did get to vote. But only after two guarantors signed for her.

One of them was Veejay.