

DECIPHERING THE ROLE OF ELECTED COUNCILLORS



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President

IT'S ELECTION TIME AGAIN and I'm very pleased that licence holders still have the right to vote for PEO's president-elect. This concept was under threat for some years as a previous council thought licence holders had not always chosen the best candidates in past elections and wanted the system changed so that council would select a president from the group of elected councillors.

To be fair, candidates may not always have a clear understanding of the laws that relate to the association and its staff, and may not have had a clear understanding of the president's power and role, leading to promises that were not in their ability to deliver. Unfortunately, the average licence holder is not in a position to know this

but I see this as no reason to take away the voting privilege of licence holders. My solution is to better inform licence holders on the realities of council's role.

PEO councillors are tasked with providing the overall direction for the association and the profession. Council deals with the high-level, strategic issues of governance while responsibility for issues relating to staffing, human resources and the administration of the *Professional Engineers Act* lie with the CEO/registrar. This breakdown is often confused during election campaigns and it's prudent to point out the separation of roles. Staff obviously plays a major role in PEO operations, and staff and volunteers must work closely together toward mutual goals so the profession can truly serve the public. But potential councillors need to understand and respect the division of functions and not overstep these boundaries.

Another misunderstood issue from the last few years is that the lieutenant governor appointees (LGAs) on council are in some way detracting from PEO governance. Because we operate under an act of the legislature, we are required to have a component of LGAs in our governance structure and the attorney general makes sure that competent people are provided to represent the public. In fact, the input from the LGAs exceeds that of many elected councillors, in most cases. Recent research shows that LGAs serve an average of 69 days a year on PEO business. Currently, only the elected president commits more time to the association. I believe any suggestion that PEO seek to reduce government input into PEO council is only likely to return PEO to the poor relationship it had with government a few years ago, when we need continued good relations with the government to make any progress at all.

One issue that has us working closely with the provincial government is the Elliot Lake public inquiry, which was established to inquire into and report on events surrounding the collapse on June 23, 2012, of part of the Algo Centre Mall. PEO is co-operating fully with the commission of inquiry and has offered to assist Justice Paul R. Bélanger, who is leading the inquiry. You can track the progress of the inquiry through the commission's website at www.elliottlakeinquiry.ca and PEO's participation through a page on the PEO website at www.peo.on.ca/News/Elliot_Lake/ElliotLakeInquiry.html. PEO also issued a professional practice bulletin in the November/December 2012 issue of *Engineering Dimensions* on structural engineering assessments of existing buildings. This document is also available on our website at www.peo.on.ca/publications/guidelinespracticebulletin2.pdf.

Another issue of collaboration involves my intention to wean council off any program that is non-regulatory and thus in the bailiwick of the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers (OSPE), and to have licence holders confirm by referendum that we are doing the right thing. Unfortunately, no issues have yet reached this stage, but we have been working together with OSPE on education proposals to the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, on issues relating to the Ontario Centre for Engineering and Public Policy, and on keeping government apprised of developments in our profession.

Although it is unlikely that candidates for PEO council will have expertise in all the items currently on PEO's agenda, it would be great to elect engineers who can see the big picture—including the distinct roles of PEO and OSPE—and have an understanding of their own role in helping council make balanced decisions. Those who possess these qualities will be able to make immediate and valuable contributions to the governance of our profession. I encourage you to involve yourself in the 2013 election and to make an informed decision on our future leaders. As always, I welcome your comments and questions at president@peo.on.ca. Σ