

Civic league hopes to engage electorate

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A grassroots movement led by a group calling itself the North Bay Civic League is attempting to engage the public and boost voter turnout leading up to the next municipal election.

Group representatives Peggy Walsh-Craig, John Patterson and Harriet Madigan appeared before council Monday to share the concept with municipal politicians and to encourage the public to participate in an online survey that will be used as the basis for discussion leading up to the vote in October and afterward.

Madigan told council the group is modelling itself after a civic league founded in Guelph in 2004, which managed to increase voter turnout in that community during the 2006 municipal election, from 36% in 2003 to more than 50%.

Founded by members of various community groups, including Nipissing Environmental Watch, the civic league has launched a website at www.northbaycivicleague.org.

"It's really a long-term project," said Walsh-Craig, noting the group expects to have a much greater impact leading up to the 2014 election.

She said the online survey, which aims to set out a series of community values, will be ongoing with the findings to be matched in the future with the voting records of municipal council members on various civic issues. Walsh-Craig said the intent is to better inform the public about who council members are and what they stand for.

As a member of Nipissing Environmental Watch, Walsh Craig said that group has in the past surveyed the public and found many people don't bother to vote because they don't know the candidates. She also noted an overall lack of public involvement regarding municipal issues.

Public apathy regarding municipal politics is apparent in North Bay, at least at the polls and during budget deliberations.

There have been almost no public presentations to council in recent years during budget deliberations.

Only about 45% of the electorate turned out at the polls during the 2006 election, a slight improvement over the 43% turnout during the 2003 vote.

The deadline to file nomination papers for the Oct. 25 election is Sept. 10. So far, only a few hopefuls have officially filed including incumbents Tanya Vrebosch-Merry, Mac Bain and Mike Anthony along with newcomers Gilbert Gagnon and David Briggs.