

“Public” records, obscured

Politicians are legally required to reveal contributions to their political campaigns, but the information is often useless in Halifax. Tim Bousquet explains.

THIS IS THE FIRST OF EIGHT PAGES OF FORM 41 submitted for District 17 councillor Linda Mosher. Many candidates submitted computerized spreadsheets or typed forms, but there is no requirement that the form be legible; large sections of Mosher’s handwritten submission are essentially unreadable, and so while her Form 41 meets the letter of the law, it serves no useful purpose whatsoever.

FORMS 40 AND 41 ARE THE CAMPAIGN contribution reports legally required of all candidates running in municipal and school board elections; Form 40 is for money given to a candidate directly, while Form 41 is for money given to a candidate’s campaign association, a group working on the candidate’s behalf. Not all candidates have associations.

FORMS 40 AND 41, WHICH ARE PUBLICLY available, track contributions to the candidate. The candidate is also required to report his or her expenditures, but unlike the cities of Montreal, Calgary and Vancouver, which put that information online, Haligonians are not allowed to view candidate expenditure reports. The potential for self-serving expenditures or other abuse is enormous, but there is no way for the public to discover it.

R.W. EATON IS EVIDENTLY THE OFFICIAL AGENT responsible for tracking contributions to Mosher’s campaign. He or she filled out the form and submitted it to the municipal clerk’s office. Along with the other candidates’ forms, the clerk placed it in a four-inch thick black binder. In Montreal, Toronto and Calgary, they put candidates’ campaign contribution information online, but Halifax does not. Haligonians can view the forms, but it involves a trip to City Hall and a charge of 25 cents per page levied for copying.

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FORM 41
SECTIONS 49A and 49B
ASSOCIATION'S CAMPAIGN CONTRIBUTIONS
DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

Name of Association: CAMPAIGN OF LINDA MOSHER
 Name of Agent: R.W. EATON
 Name of Candidate Supported: LINDA MOSHER
 Municipality/School Board: MUNICIPALITY
 Date of Election: OCT 14/08

List of Contributors (see note below):

Contributor	Civic Address	Contributions
<u>G. Ruddlestone</u>	<u>241 Nelson Ave - Hfx NS B3N 2B8</u>	<u>100.00</u>
<u>J. Robert Taylor</u>	<u>19 Market Rd</u>	<u>50.00</u>
<u>Scotia Capital Fund</u>	<u>6150 Quinlan Rd - Hfx NS B3L 1A3</u>	<u>200.00</u>
<u>Armco Capital Fund</u>	<u>6017</u>	<u>500.00</u>
<u>Newfoundland Public Rd</u>	<u>6009</u>	<u>500.00</u>

Note: Insert full name of contributor and residential or business address. Use street address, not postal address. Contributions must be shown for every contributor whose contributions totalled more than \$50.00 since the most recent election.

R.W. EATON, the appointed agent of LINDA MOSHER (name of association) in the municipal/school board/CSAP election on OCT 14/08 (date) certify that the foregoing statement of disclosure is a true and complete disclosure of all contributions made to me as agent of the said association as required by Sections 49A and 49B of the Municipal Elections Act.

Tim Bousquet
Agent of Association

(to be filed within 60 days after regular polling day with the clerk of the municipality/secretary of school board)

(A translation of this form is available in French.)

CANDIDATES ARE REQUIRED TO REPORT ONLY contributions of \$50 or more. Smaller contributions are unknown, and therefore secret. A determined group could get around the reporting requirement by “bundling” contributions—a church, a union or the Chamber of Commerce could hold a fundraising party, with each attendee ponying up \$49, potentially raising thousands of dollars for a candidate (and buying great influence on the councillor’s votes) with no one the wiser. Montreal, Toronto and Winnipeg prohibit anonymous contributions; Halifax does not.

BY FAR THE LARGEST CONTRIBUTORS TO council campaigns are developers, and the largest of those—\$9,000 given to nine councillors across the political spectrum, including this \$500 donation to Mosher—come from those firms associated with the Armoian family, including Armco Capital Fund, APL Properties and public-private partnership school developer Scotia Learning Centres.

PRESUMABLY, THE FORMS ARE REQUIRED SO the electorate is informed as to who is financially supporting candidates. But candidates are not required to submit the form until 60 days after the election, and so the form will not help voters make informed decisions. A better system would have candidates enter contributions daily, as they’re received, onto a publicly viewable online database. In the meantime, we’ve posted the information at thecoast.ca.