

Campaign worker to fight bylaw that prohibits signs on city land

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Election signs aren't an eyesore to campaign worker Michelle Hindley.

She sees the wooden stakes with their bold placards as symbols of democratic freedom of expression.

So it made her angry when the city demanded she remove Hugh Hanrahan signs from the city property in front of the Reform party candidate's campaign headquarters.

She grew even angrier when she discovered that city crews were tearing down some election signs from every party posted on city property.

"There has been a violation of every citizen's Charter of Rights," said Hindley, referring to a recent Supreme Court of Canada ruling that struck down city bylaws banning political signs from public property.

Hindley is launching her own charter challenge to fight the Edmonton bylaw which gives the city the right to remove signs near public roadways.

She believes the law unreasonably restricts freedom of expression

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— Michelle Hindley
Reform campaign worker

and has hired a lawyer to voice her argument in court.

Lawyer Shirish Chotalia says she'll argue the case in two parts.

First she'll attack the bylaw on grounds it might be unconstitutional. She also plans to take issue with the way the city has interpreted it.

No one is suggesting that any sign presenting a true traffic hazard shouldn't be removed, Chotalia said.

But Hindley has documented accounts of signs being yanked from spots nowhere near traffic.

"There were signs taken down from the top of Groat Road that weren't close to the edge of the road," Hindley said.

The director of bylaw services in Edmonton said the city removed all election signs that might have

obstructed the view or distracted the attention of passing motorists.

Rudy Berghuys said the city didn't touch signs set far back from the roadways.

Confiscated signs were stored in a South Side yard where candidates were invited to collect them for reuse, he said.

Hindley worked on a Reform campaign but says she's getting wide support from all political camps.

And she doesn't want her argument to become a partisan issue.

"It's whether we as individuals have a right to use some public property. The Supreme Court says we do."

Doug Ford, northern Alberta co-chair for the Progressive Conservatives, said a number of candidates expressed concern over the city's actions.

In some parts of Edmonton, even signs that fell within the legal limits were removed, he said.

Voters in Edmonton Northwest didn't find any Anne McLellan signs on city land.

"We don't want to disturb any city bylaws," said McLellan's campaign manager Claire Belzil Laskin.



Rick MacWilliam The Journal

Michelle Hindley, left, and Janet Blond display some of the election signs which were removed because they were on city property and too close to public roadways

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