

Mayor Rob Keffer's Inaugural Address

December 2, 2014

Town of Bradford West Gwillimbury

Good evening everyone, and thank you for joining us for the Official Inauguration of our new Town Council.

Thank you to all who have been a part of this evening's program, and to our Town Staff for putting this event together. I welcome all our guests, and want to thank all the family, friends, neighbours and residents for being here tonight, to make this a special occasion.

It is a great honour to have the confidence of this community to serve as Mayor of Bradford West Gwillimbury.

My wife, Jean, and I both grew up in families where our parents were active in their communities and they taught us to take an interest in what was going on and to give back. Our interest in municipal politics has grown from both of our fathers being West Gwillimbury Councillors, along with my Grandfather being a Vaughan Councillor.

I want to speak briefly about election campaigns, the democratic process, and the great opportunity campaigns give us to listen, learn, renew, and connect to our Town. All my fellow Councillors and all the Candidates went through this process, and learned from it.

Life goes on during a campaign, whatever the highs and lows. Both candidate Jim Slykhuis and I lost our greatest supporters - our fathers - during the campaign.

We also mourned the loss of Councillor Ron Simpson, whose municipal political career started in 1986.

But we learn from life's challenges, and are motivated to work the best we can in the time we have to make a difference.

Throughout the election campaign, we spoke to thousands of residents working with a dedicated group of volunteers, which included Jonathan Scott, who managed my campaign while attending law school in Cardiff, Wales. We spoke about practical plans to build a better town, not simply a bigger town.

And it resonated with the residents.

This evening, I want to focus on some of the things we plan to undertake during the first few months and first year in office to improve the life of everyone in town, and to outline the principles I believe should guide all our decisions.

There are some practical things to take care of right away:

The new Council has been trained for their new role, and I have enjoyed meeting with each member of council to hear their priorities and concerns.

Together, we will set a strategic plan for the next four years.

We also need to pass this year's budget, and hire a new town manager.

That's where principles come into play.

My first priority will always be ensuring we operate with the highest respect for our taxpayers.

The budgets we pass must be about stewarding your money wisely and accountably.

Any tax increase needs to be affordable, and clearly tied to the cost increases we face to provide the services you rely on for your family.

Your Town Council will return to in-depth budgeting, to make sure every dollar is accounted for and we ensure the best value for your money.

I am frugal, and I know you, along with the entire new council, are too.

However, we will also invest where needed to build a better town.

Budgeting is about balancing affordability and our goals, so we grow in a smart way, and in a way that benefits all parts of town, while keeping taxes as low as possible.

As we grow, we will also need to update our Official Plan, as required by the province.

This update will be done by listening to residents, bringing people together so Town Council can listen and learn from the whole community.

Your new Town Council will be collaborative, consultative, respectful and transparent, accountable to you, the voters, in all we do.

That's my second principle.

Deputy Mayor Leduc will spearhead a residents' engagement process where open meetings will be held for every ward to have two-way conversations about moving the Town forward.

I am open to ideas like a lobbyist registry and online expense reports, which some of my colleagues on Council called for in the campaign.

I want to bring the community together to discuss a new vision for the community centre, the facility we are in tonight.

A refurbished community centre will be a critical component of downtown revitalization and provide quality recreation in the older part of town.

I am committed to refurbishing the ball diamonds, skate park and soccer fields.

Let's come together as a community and create a vision, then get a plan in place so Town Council can move forward to refurbish this recreation facility.

We also need to look at how our Parks and Trails Master Plan will work with our vision to create a gateway 'focal feature' at Bridge Street on the Holland River, with integrated bike trails.

How, exactly, we go about doing that will be a result of community consultation.

Likewise, we need to move forward with creating the new Henderson Park as a beautiful new recreation option on the western end of the urban area.

This kind of balance to ensure all areas of town benefit from Town Council's investments is critical. It's what we all ran on. We want to build a community that benefits everyone.

Members of Council are committed to ensure we get seniors' and affordable housing built. My goal remains to meet the County's call for 202 new affordable housing units by 2020.

Underpinning all of these plans is job growth.

We will move forward with economic development with renewed focus and a better business plan.

We will tweak the plan for the Highway 400 employment corridor.

Early in the New Year, we will look at starting the environmental assessment to bring servicing along County Road 88 to Hwy 400 so we can start sooner and more economically than waiting for the new Fifth Line interchange.

We also need the best possible plan in place for the new interchange and the proposed arterial roads.

Simultaneously, I will work with my colleague mayors, county councillors and regional councillors to push Queen's Park to put the Bradford Bypass back on track.

In fact, tomorrow morning I will send a letter to the Minister of Transportation outlining our desire to get the Bypass back on the books to help solve commuting challenges across our region.

I will also work with the province on transit, in terms of both our local bus service and GO transit, so our commuters benefit from the provincial funding available.

We have a lot of work to do.

We have an ambitious agenda to build a better town for all areas of town. We will focus on improved recreation facilities, an accountable council, job growth, working to preserve heritage, investing in seniors' and affordable housing, and making commuting easier.

And we will work towards these goals while being frugal with your tax dollars, being consultative and accountable, and working to ensure all areas of town benefit from growth.

These are our goals.

These are our principles.

I'm struck by the simple truth that what we learnt from our parents' community service, we pass on to our children, and that as we work to improve our town, we'll do it for everyone: seniors, adults, young parents, youth and children.

There is a lot to do, but I will always strive to be available to hear your ideas and respond to your concerns.

Together, we will build a better town for all areas of town.

I look forward to the challenges and possibilities ahead.

Thank you again for the honour to serve as your Mayor.