

*“The Most Important Order of Government”*

A new generation of leadership is emerging in Ontario municipalities after the mayors and councillors elected in the fall election have been sworn-in to office in recent days.

New Mayors have now taken over in London, Hamilton, Kingston, Toronto, Waterloo, Kitchener, Mississauga, Brampton, Windsor and many other towns and cities.

In addition, there are many new faces amongst the Councillors now in office across Ontario's 444 municipalities. Many of them are new, young, bright, enthusiastic and energetic. It is a wonderful new wave of local leadership that is emerging, and there is an immense opportunity for fresh thinking and a new way of doing business in local government.

I have argued for many years in my books and speeches that for most people and most businesses, most of the time, local government has become the most important order of government.

Our towns and cities are where most Canadians live. They are most directly impacted in their daily lives by the function, operation and regulations of the municipal council. Just think about your usual routine: wake up to the clock radio (London owns the electricity distribution system), go to the bathroom (your municipality most definitely owns and operates the water and sewage systems, and is investing millions of dollars in upgrading and improving these systems so you can flush without worry), prepare the kids' breakfasts (your municipality regulates many aspects of food and restaurants), hit the road or jump on a bus (local transportation planning and corridors and public transit are two of the most critical responsibilities for municipalities), enjoying a decent drive to work because the city plows have cleared the streets in the early morning hours when you were still asleep; you go to work in a factory, office or business that is located in an area zoned by the city, in a building that had to get local planning approval, in a district that likely has local parks, recreation facilities, libraries and other public amenities; you get home and take the kids to their ringette league or to the public library for study on a school project; when you get home you take the garbage to the curb so it can get picked up the next morning, and so on.

What a City Council does touches our lives in so many ways every day, but we don't think about it very much—and frankly, Council's have done a lousy job of informing you and your family about the many things a municipality does routinely, and for a very modest amount of money from you.

The value we get from municipal services is immense. How much is it worth to your family to be able to go to a park and romp with the dog? Take the grandkids to the local aquatic centre? Have a drink of good, clean, safe water from the tap in your kitchen? Have access to a world of learning and fun at your local library branch? Know that in case of an emergency, well trained and qualified police, fire and ambulance services are a phone call away?

As we begin the new four-year civic cycle, let's pause for a moment and thank the people who have stepped forward to serve on our councils. And let's give them a little honeymoon period to get acclimated as they become immersed in public policy.

Most of all, let's hope that their energy and enthusiasm will help build creative, sustainable and prosperous communities for our families and our kids. Local leadership is crucial to our city's future.