

Is it extremely important?: Mayor Thompson on voting in October's municipal election

Interview with Allan Thompson continued from last week's edition of The Caledon Citizen

By Zachary Roman

Despite his winning of Caledon's 2018 municipal election, Mayor Allan Thompson said the 32 per cent voter turnout for that election hurt.

The now-outgoing Mayor said since he and his team hit just about every house in Caledon and had some great conversations, he expected more people to be hitting the polls.

"I think people come out when they want change, but they need to realize that everything they do and touch every day is the responsibility of their local municipality," said Thompson. "Yes, I'm accountable to both the province and federal government, I've got my parameters. But your garbage, your snow plowing, your recreation? it's done by municipalities. Here's your chance to get out and vote on the person who's making the best decision."

It's important for the general public to know why Caledon Council is making a given decision, said Thompson, and that's why sometimes in a council meeting he'll ask a question he may already know the answer to. By doing this, Thompson said he can have Town staff or a Councillor explain a topic to the public before Council votes on it.

"A lot of times, they don't know the backstory? how we've got to the decision we've made," said Thompson.

He said it takes him a long time to get through the grocery store as often people will pull him aside to ask a question about a Council topic, but that it is always worth it to explain to a constituent what is going on.

As a Mayor, Thompson said you have to be willing to engage with the public at any time. He said visiting different coffee shops and restaurants around Town allows him to hear the "word of mouth" of how people are feeling around Caledon.

While he believes social media is important, Thompson said person-to-person conversation is critical. He joked that his staff go nuts because he shares his cell phone number with everyone.

Thompson said he does his best to get back to people as soon as possible when they call. He added it's a nice break from all of the dense reading required of the job when somebody calls to talk.

For the amount of hours Thompson said he puts into Mayor's duties, Thompson said he'd make more doing a minimum wage job. Then again, he added, he was never in it for the money.

Caledon Council recently approved a 24 per cent compensation increase for itself, something a few Councillors and current Councillor candidates have spoken out against. Thompson said, in his opinion, there would be nothing worse than putting a new Council in place then asking them to vote on their salary.

He said it's the current Council's responsibility to set the tone, and that even with the raise Caledon's new Mayor and Council salaries will only be 10 per cent above the median salaries of similar municipalities' Mayor and Councils.

Thompson said the raise is the first step towards Caledon's Councillors really being able to do the job full time without any other work, something he said will become necessary as Caledon continues to grow.

?If you want to get good people, you've got to give them something for the time and effort they're putting into it,? said Thompson. ?If you can't stand up for yourself?how are you going to stand up for your community??

Included in the motion that granted Council a compensation increase was a budget increase for hiring more Town of Caledon staff. Thompson said more staff are needed to meet the demands of residents in a timely manner, considering how much pressure the current Town staff are already under.

In the next term of Caledon Council, there will be two less Regional Councillors, as well as a new Ward Councillor for the newly-created Ward 6.

Thompson said the two Regional Councillors (one for Wards 1, 2 and 3 and one for Wards 4, 5, and 6) will be extremely busy, but he feels things will still be okay.

Thompson said he likes how each ward will now have a champion for their specific community.

However, he emphasized that communication between the Regional and Ward Councillors will be critical to make sure everyone has the information they need to make informed decisions.

Thompson said he's never lost sleep over a decision he's made in his political career. With a laugh, he added that he certainly does lose sleep considering decisions and thinking about Council business.

?My dad gave me advice when I first got on Council: Make sure (with) the decision you make that you can sleep good at night,? said Thompson. ?I have to say that I have been very satisfied on everything that we've done.?

Thompson said he's absolutely going to miss being Mayor, and he's grateful for the support of his family through it all. Now, he said it's time for him to spend time with family, and it's the reason he's not running for office again.

Thompson said he's thankful for his good friends that have kept him humble as Mayor, and that losing sight of being humble and grounded is one of the most dangerous things a politician can do.

?You get people craving? power and control and it just consumes them and they turn into these political animals,? said Thompson. ?It's almost like an addiction, and I've watched really good people crumble under that. You just got to keep yourself grounded and disciplined.?

Thompson said he remembered one Councillor he worked with in the past who he admired and said was a great Councillor. But that Councillor, come election time, said they would not be running again as they didn't like the type of person they were becoming as a politician.

Thompson said he really took that moment to heart, and said his two kids also play a key role in keeping him accountable.

Thompson now has two grandsons and said retiring from politics will allow him to be really present in their lives.