

Thompson reflects on his first year as Caledon's mayor

By Bill Rea

It's been a year already.

This coming Wednesday (Dec. 2) will mark one year since Allan Thompson was sworn in as Caledon's seventh mayor.

Despite some bumps along the way, the mayor seems to be enjoying himself in his new role, and thoughts of running again in three years are definitely there.

At this point, yes, was his reply if he is planning to run in 2018.

Thompson pointed out some people undergo performance reviews in their jobs. In his case, such a review would involve such questions as whether he's been meeting his mandate, and he believes he has.

In setting a vision for Caledon, he said work has started on that, with the commencement of the visioning exercise for the Whitebelt in the southern part of town. Things are starting off slowly, with last week seeing the first of numerous public sessions on the matter.

One issue that came up a lot in last year's election campaign was customer service, especially at Town Hall, and Thompson is pleased with the progress that's been made there.

It's an ongoing exercise, he said. I think the public's finding it's a lot more accessible.

He's also boasting of an open-door policy in his office.

It's got the security guys a little concerned, he grinned, but pointed out residents of town are customers.

Cutting red tape is easier said than done, but we're making headway, he added. Staff has been amazing to adapt to the change.

He also praised former CAO Doug Barnes (who retired last month) with his help in accommodating the change. As well, the mayor said he's been impressed with the calibre of people who've applied to replace him.

Thompson has also had to work with a relatively new council team, with three new members elected with him last year, and a fourth, Annette Groves, who returned to council after a four-year absence.

I've got an amazing council team, he declared, adding the membership represents a wide range of experience. He added his four Regional colleagues have been standing strong for the good of Caledon.

One thing that has been evident in the last year is the team approach that Thompson has been promoting.

Every leader has different styles, he said. If you have good people around you giving good advice, you make good decisions.

There are other changes in the works.

In his inaugural address a year ago, Thompson said he was planning to reintroduce committees of council. That will be happening in January. As well, council meetings will be held in evenings, making them more accessible. In addition, he said he's anxious to go to residents, rather than forcing them to go to Town Hall. To that end, he's already held one town-hall session Saturday in Bolton, and another is planned for this coming Saturday (Nov. 28) in Inglewood. He also pointed to the fact there are audio versions of council meetings now available on the Town's website.

Thompson observed some people have complained it's a little hard to follow where on the agenda councillors are from the audio versions. I think I need to be a little more explicit, he remarked, adding it's assuring that so many people seem to be listening.

There's always room for improvement.

Needless to say, the workload Thompson is carrying is a lot heavier than when he was a Regional councillor. He said he's working about 90 hours per week, and sometimes 100. Dealing with emails is a chore, as he said he sometimes gets 500 in a day.

Part of that is my doing, he said. I'm in the office at 7:30 in the morning.

He also said he found out early on than he needed to learn how to pace himself. It takes a while to find your groove, he observed.

The new job forces him to focus on the whole town, rather than the area he used to represent. He's learned he has to keep his hands off the work that the councillors are supposed to do, especially in his old area of Ward 2.

It's now their role, not mine, he said. It's been a mind shift, but I think we've got there.

Thompson also said Town staff has been helpful in getting him used to the job.

I'm sure I've stepped on toes here, he remarked. Staff's not telling me that.

The biggest challenge these days is dealing with roads and infrastructure, and Thompson said the most talked about issue is bringing high-speed internet to Caledon. That didn't come up during last year's election, but Thompson himself raised it election night during his victory address.

That was not an election issue, but it sure was something I heard about at the door, he remarked.

He added a five-year plan is coming to council and it includes providing the funding to develop high-speed, broad-band wi-fi across town.

He also stressed this is necessary infrastructure. Many students need access to the internet to get at their homework assignments.

"We've got to find a way to provide the venue," he said.

Although it will take a tax levy to get the money, Thompson observed that for every dollar, the Town can get at \$15 from the federal and Provincial governments. He added Kitchener ? Waterloo and Niagara Region were able to obtain internet service in much the same way. He said it's an economical way to provide a necessity.

When it comes to surprises over the last year, Thompson said it's been disheartening to see that councillors in Mississauga have had time to take an interest in Caledon planning matters.

"As long as we take the high road and remain strong, it's going to be completely fine," he added.

Thompson added it's been disconcerting that conflict of interest allegations have been made against him. But he added he's always made his decisions with integrity, stressing that's he's never been in conflict, and he'll be glad when this episode is in the past.

Among the highlights of the year was the Pan American Games in July. Thompson stressed that Caledon had more people volunteer than any other municipality.

For the coming year, Thompson said the budget should be finalized early in 2016.

"I hope we can get a good budget put to bed," he said.

Council is also putting together a work plan, focussing on the needs of the community. Thompson is also hoping to see progress on the visioning exercise for the Whitebelt, and once the Province announces the route for the new highway in the GTA?West corridor, land will be freed up for planning.

He also said the Provincial facilitation into land-use issues in Bolton is done.

"I think the nice part is we got a lot of things wrapped up by the end of the year," he said.



Allan Thompson will be marking one year as Mayor of Caledon next week.