

Shelburne Mayor Ken Bennington won't seek re-election in October's municipal vote

Written By **PETER RICHARDSON**

On Monday afternoon, after 20 years in public service, Shelburne Mayor Ken Bennington announced he would not be seeking re-election in October's municipal election.

When asked by the Free Press following a Council meeting on July 9, as to why he withdrew his nomination papers, Mayor Bennington said he would simply stand by his public statement on Facebook.

"With my heart heavy, after having served my community for 20 years of elected office, it is time to turn the page in my career as a public servant," Mayor Bennington wrote. "A new and exciting chapter awaits, and like a good book that you can't put down, I look forward to it with anticipation."

He added, "To the good people of Shelburne, it has been my pleasure and my honour to serve you. May God bless the Town of Shelburne and the wonderful people that call it home."

In further discussion on Monday, the mayor opened up enough to admit that his decision was influenced, in part, by his family and by an announcement from two other councillors that they would be signing papers on Tuesday to run against him as a mayor and deputy mayor combination. Mayor Bennington, after considerable soul searching and contemplation, decided that he would sooner withdraw than fight that potentially disruptive battle.

In explaining his decision, the mayor noted several decisive factors. One was the fact that over the past year, he has been seen as being a primary force, in two public battles, one over the Feral Cat Rescue situation and the other and more recent, the Fiddle Park sale. Regardless of his personal stance on both issues, Ken felt that perceptions were against him. As the mayor, he was seen as the ultimate power in both cases and neither one was publicly favourable to either him or Council, in general.

A second, was the issue of the OPP costing and the local policing dilemma. It was no secret that the Mayor was and is a strong supporter of the existing force, however he also recognized the huge cost of maintaining the force while trying to build it a new home.

A home that would cost upwards of over \$8 million when completed. \$8 million that the Town simply does not have and would have to borrow the bulk of, in order to build. Considering all of the other infrastructure that the Town requires and that, the residents expect, even if it was possible to borrow the funds, the costs would be severely detrimental to the rest. The mayor felt strongly, that these and other factors would make his chances of winning re-election dubious at best and so decided to let the new blood, coming up, face the problems while he watched studiously from the sidelines and moved on with his own agenda

Ken was clear about his reasons for becoming involved in public service, in the first place. He was not driven by a need for power or public recognition, but rather was just a guy who wanted to help his community. It started with him being a volunteer firefighter and that led to being Hydro Commissioner and then a councillor, the Deputy Mayor and culminated in him becoming the Mayor. Now he felt that it was time to step away from public office and move ahead with the rest of his life. Recently re-married and with his family interests at heart, he wants to change his priorities and look to a new future. As for Shelburne, his parting thoughts were that as a growing community, in search of new opportunities and new horizons, with a growing population diversity, both ethnically and spiritually, his wish was that the people of Shelburne simply "accept and love each other"!