

County warden will change next week

Mono Mayor Laura Ryan will be hanging up her Dufferin County warden's gavel next Thursday evening, and Melancthon Mayor Bill Hill is most likely to take it in hand.

Although anything could happen at next week's 'inaugural' meeting when the warden and the committee chairs are chosen, Mayor Hill is believed to be the only member of county council to have advanced his name to succeed Mayor Ryan.

In phone interviews earlier this week, both said the plan should be no surprise.

Ms. Ryan said she had made it clear when elected as warden that she would spend only one year at the helm. Mr. Hill said he had stated upon his 2010 mayoralty election that he would seek the wardenship for 2014.

Ms. Ryan agreed that 2013 has been a year of challenges for the county, but said she has found it rewarding in many ways. It gave her a broader knowledge of the county as a whole, she said, and of the problems facing other municipalities.

As well, she got to know the county's senior staff better, and might have gained a better understanding of the challenges they face. On finances, she said the county used to have a 10 per cent or better discretionary use of its revenues but 'now we're lucky if one per cent is discretionary.'

One of the major problems Ms. Ryan sees now is infrastructure and the enforced Asset Management Plan.

Another could be the drafting of the county's mandated Official Plan. She would like to see the plan drafted and then fine-tuned. 'It would be a living document.' She said some residents feel it is being rushed, but the province has set the deadlines for completion.

The major stumbling block in the drafting has been the county's weighted vote. Ms. Ryan said the county should take a cue from what has been done elsewhere with the voting, rather than to reinvent the wheel.

Mr. Hill, who now lives in Melancthon, had previously served as a councillor in Shelburne and also as a trustee on the former Dufferin County Board of Education for nine years.

His initial service as a Melancthon councillor began in 1998 when he was chosen to fill a councillor vacancy after the death of then-reeve Gordon Oldfield.

He was subsequently elected to the council and, in 2008, assumed the deputy reeveship upon the death of D.C. Broderick.

Then, in 2010, he won the mayoralty in a tight election race with Debbie Fawcett of Horning's Mills.

Although his political and civic background is significantly broad, Mr. Hill said in an interview that he wanted to serve on all county committees prior to becoming warden.

This, he said, will enable him to take the helm with knowledge of all county staff and of the condition of infrastructure and what challenges are being faced.

What happens after 2014?

Neither Mayor Ryan nor Mayor Hill would say whether they plan to seek re-election in October 2014.

By Wes Keller

