

Bruce County council returns Smith as warden

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Sun Times correspondent

Saugeen Shores Mayor Mike Smith was re-elected warden of Bruce County for 2011 at the inaugural session of county council Thursday.

In his inaugural address, Smith noted the importance of moving forward next year without the financial help of stimulus and infrastructure funding from the federal and provincial governments and relying on the co-operation with traditional partners such as the municipalities in facing new challenges.

"I firmly believe this is not so much a threat going forward as a challenge; one that Bruce County will accept, adjust to and continue with building the community we want," Smith said.

A growing challenge is the wind energy industry and its divisiveness.

"The question of wind energy has become too controversial. It is splitting our communities. Too often the debate has been framed as those in support and those opposed — you must take a side because there appears to be no middle ground," said Smith.

"Bruce County has been a leader in the past developing policies that address alternate energy solutions and I think we must again have meaningful local input to this issue. We need to work with the provincial government so that we can achieve the objectives of the province and satisfy the legitimate concerns of our citizens," he added.

Smith stressed the importance of a long-term county housing strategy to meet a growing need for affordable housing. He's hoping to involve other levels of government and the private sector.

There are plans to complete the Grey Bruce Line and the intersection at Scene in the coming year.

The warden is optimistic about enhancing the county's relationship with the two First Nations communities in Bruce.

"I believe we have an opportunity to advance that work with Chief (Ralph) Akiwenzie and Chief (Randall) Kahgee and develop a protocol that addresses the interest of both Bruce County and the First Nations communities, because I believe we seek a common goal — community that addresses the needs of

its citizens now and provides the foundations for future opportunities," Smith said.

Smith edged out Kincardine Mayor

Larry Kraemer on the second ballot. Kraemer would only say that he won't be seeking the warden's chair again. It's the second year in a row he has un-

successfully run for warden.

"I'll do the best I can for the county. That's my duty. It's all I can do is to see it through," Kraemer said.

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Murdoch retiring at end of term

Scott Dunn
QMI Agency

Popular and outspoken MPP Bill Murdoch is leaving provincial politics at the next election.

"Bogor" Bill Murdoch, who built his political success with his populist message, has railed against Queen's Park bureaucrats, the Niagara Escarpment Commission and what he views as a meddling and out-of-touch "Toronto mentality," to name three of his regular targets.

He's worn the label of maverick proudly and has said he believes politicians' first job is to represent those who elected them, even when contrary to the party line.

"I think I've done what I could do at Queen's Park," Murdoch said Monday at his constituency office in Owen Sound, among friends and family who gathered for the announcement.

"I've sat as a third party, sat as opposition, sat as government and even as an independent," he said. "Been asked to leave the house and left the house. Been asked to leave and didn't leave."

"So there's not a lot of things left to do. And they know where Owen Sound and

Grey and Bruce is now."

Murdoch will have served 21 years as MPP for what is now Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound upon his retirement. He spent 12 years in municipal politics before that.

The 65-year-old beef farmer said he could point out successes such as Owen Sound's courthouse, though he noted unresolved court security costs dog it, and repaving Hwy. 26 halfway to Meaford.

"But when you help somebody that has a hard time getting through the bureaucracy, which one of the biggest downfalls of democracy is the bureaucracy... I think that's the biggest accomplishment, if you can actually go away saying we did help somebody."

He said he's in good health and it was simply time for him to leave political office.

"It comes a time. Everybody knows, they have jobs, and it comes a time I think that it just is."

"I'll still have my farm to run, I'll still belong to the local service clubs, and I'll still be outspoken. I just won't be going to Queen's Park anymore," he said.

He's staying on until the Oct. 6, 2011, election but by announcing now, he hopes to encourage candidates to step forward to replace him, he said.

"We'll see now. The game begins. Who wants the job? Hopefully there's somebody."

Murdoch regrets the longevity of the Niagara Escarpment Commission, which he views as "unnecessary," as he does the province's Greenbelt protections, which made the situation "worse."

He said he favours protecting the escarpment but considers both land-use protection zones "anti-democratic" mainly because local people and governments lost their say about local developments.

He also said often dictators are elected democratically. The premier picks the ministers, their associates and chairs of committees, which he thinks caucus should do. He suggested people should elect candidates who vow to do what the voters want, not what the premier tells them to.

He opposed former Progressive Conservative Leader John Tory's support for the widely unpopular funding of private religious schools, then suggested Tory needed to find a new job. He was kicked out of caucus for it in 2008, yet Murdoch says he likes Tory.

PC leader Tim Hudak, who called an hour before Murdoch made his retirement announcement official, has also felt the

sing of Murdoch's attacks.

Murdoch vowed in 2003 to embarrass the then-consumer and business services minister by calling for his resignation in the legislature the next day if government plans to close land registry offices in the morning happened — and they didn't.

But Hudak also never proceeded with creating regulations for Murdoch's private member's bill establishing the position of marriage commissioner, which Murdoch got passed by outmanoeuvring Hudak in the legislature. The subsequent Liberal government later gave municipal clerks power to designate marriage counsellors.

Hudak issued a news release Monday that called Murdoch's impending retirement a loss to the legislature of "one of its most tenacious members, a true maverick and a long-standing champion of rural and agricultural Ontario."

"From fighting the HST to opposing industrial wind farms to his steadfast promotion of Ontario meats and produce, Bill was a tough and effective legislator who stood up proudly for the families he represented at Queen's Park."

Murdoch said he doesn't oppose wind farms — only the lack of local say in where they should go.

Ovid Jackson was mayor of Owen Sound and Murdoch was reeve of Sydenham when the two sat across from one another to negotiate land annexation in the '80s.

"You could say Bill is a very colourful guy," the former Liberal MP said by phone Monday. "He saw how Eddie Sargent operated and he knew in this population of Bruce-Grey you have to be a populist. And you have to speak up."

Sargent, the legendary local Liberal MPP who also wore the maverick description proudly, was known for climbing through a window into his Queen's Park office and for pranks, like one on the Speaker of the legislature, when he called to say he was making an emergency airplane landing on the lawn at Queen's Park.

Bill is a very determined person — that's what I admire," the late David McNichol, Murdoch's political mentor, said of him upon Murdoch's inauguration in 1986 as Grey County's warden. McNichol had just served two terms.

"He sees things through," McNichol said. In doing so, Murdoch polarized people as well as charmed them. As Murdoch noted himself Monday, 16,000 people didn't vote for him in one of his four Queen's Park terms.

Murdoch lost his first attempt at provincial office when Liberal Ron Lipssett beat him by 1,800 votes in 1987.

When nominated again in 1990, Murdoch said he'd never lost in politics before and "it's not something I plan to make a habit of."

He's won every election since, the last one with 46.6% of the vote — 6,117 more than the nearest candidate, Shane Jolley of the Green Party.



DON CROSBY

Bruce County Warden Mike Smith.