

Time to get your campaign started

Nominations now being accepted for October election

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ALNWICK/HALDIMAND TOWNSHIP — Now that candidates can step forward for October municipal elections, Alnwick/Haldimand Mayor William (Bill) Finley - the longest serving municipal politician in Northumberland - is ready to hang up his hat.

"I'm likely consistent. I believe in change, but I believe in gradual change," said Mayor Finley, of his 33-year municipal political career. "I don't believe in throwing everything out."

The born-and-raised local boy was 38 with five young children at home, when someone at his Grafton church asked him to consider running. He agreed, and in 1977 he was elected to the Township of Haldimand council.

At the next election in 1979, the big issue in Haldimand was amalgamation. Then-Councillor Finley opposed the fusion of small rural municipalities and ran for reeve on the issue.

"I've always found that as you go bigger the cost gets higher," said Mayor Finley.

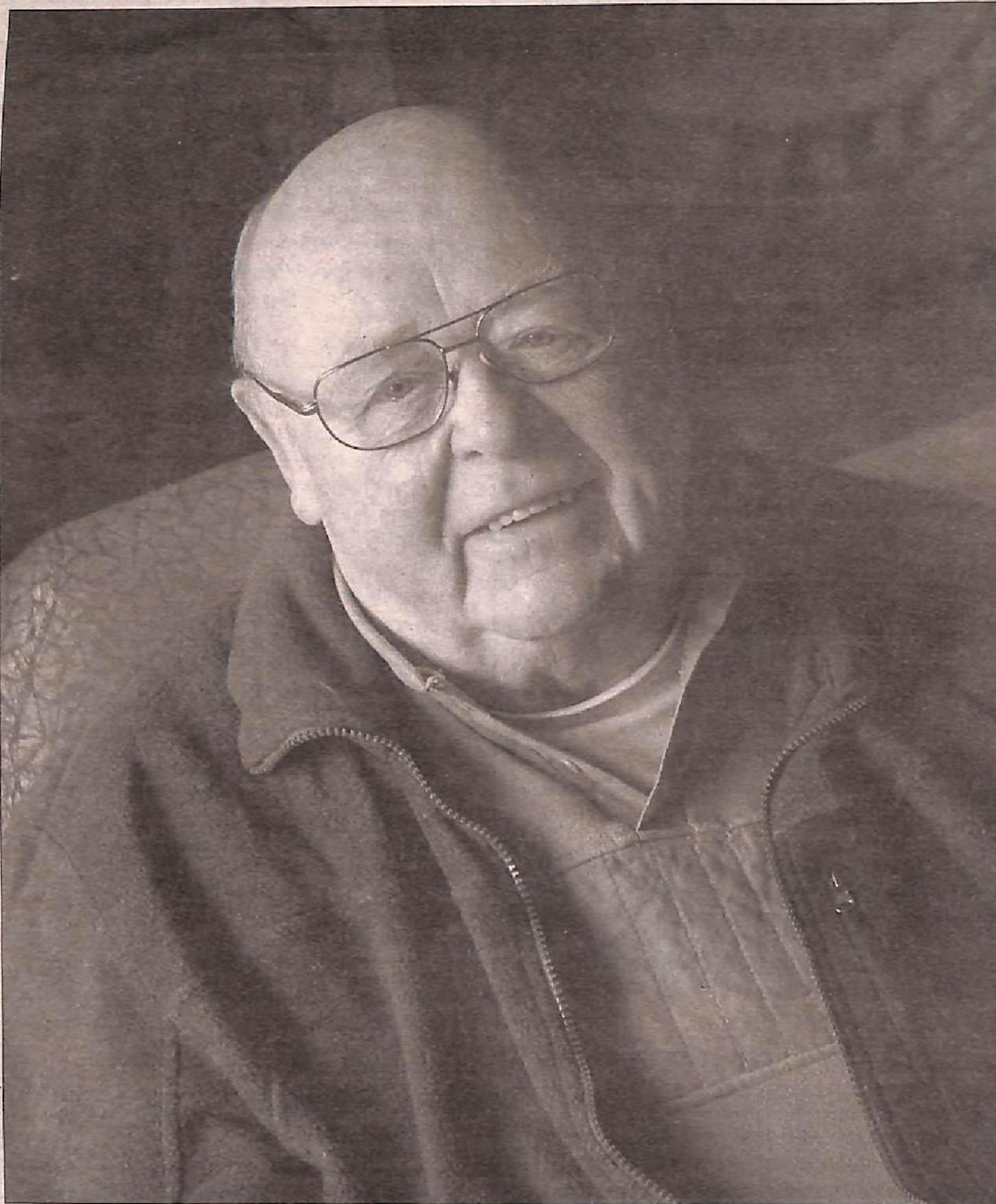
He won that 1979 election and has been the head of Haldimand council - followed by Alnwick/Haldimand Township, after provincially-backed amalgamation - ever since.

Over the following elections, Mayor Finley was acclaimed or he beat his opponents. In 33 years, he's had a number of people oppose him, but Mayor Finley has no hard feelings.

"I may not agree with them, but everybody's got good and bad qualities," said Mayor Finley.

The mayor hasn't won every battle. He supported a proposed Liquid Natural Gas plant north of Grafton, which was stopped by the Ontario Municipal Board, after citizens raised concerns.

"If you win or lose, life goes on. I don't take it personal," said Mayor



PEG MCCARTHY / NORTHUMBERLAND NEWS

GRAFTON — Alnwick/Haldimand Township Mayor Bill Finley is leaving politics after being the longest-serving politician in the Northumberland area at 33 years.

Finley.

While a fair bit has changed in Alnwick/Haldimand over three decades, when asked about his legacy, Mayor Finley doesn't point to a building or service. Instead he talks about a municipality that meets the needs of its residents with basically zero debt

load. There are two stimulus fund projects in the works, the Shelter Valley Road rehabilitation and the Centreton Library, which may require a small debenture. Aside from those, the municipality has been debt-free for years.

"Every dollar that came in went back out into the community, as

opposed to paying three to four per cent of your revenue in interest," said Mayor Finley.

"Some of these (provincial) guidelines are crazy. They'd have you in debt over your head. That's not good fiscal management."

He's a small-government politician, who has worked hard trying to keep taxes and spending low.

Over the past three years Mayor Finley's health has been failing. His left hip went and his stomach is troubling him. Alnwick/Haldimand's long-time mayor is 70 now, and ready to retire.

"I'll do the best I can to the very end," said Mayor Finley, who will not be running for re-election on Oct. 25, 2010.

Mayor Finley thinks the biggest

challenge lying ahead, for whoever picks up his mantle, will be managing costs and keeping taxes down. Changes mandated from the provincial and federal governments are making those goals more and more difficult.

Candidates interested in running for mayors, councillors or school trustees in the October election can now put their name forward. Anyone at least 18 years old, who's a Canadian citizen and a resident or landowner in the municipality can run for office. Nomination forms will be accepted from Jan. 4 to Sept. 10 at local municipal offices.

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Bill Finley

"I really hope people will step forward," said Mayor Finley. "It may not be as easy as they visualize. If we have a meeting, I spend twice as long preparing. I will likely have 100 emails to go through."

Cobourg Councillor Bob Spooner, first elected to the school board in 1985 and the longest serving municipal politician in Cobourg, wants to inform those new to the race that campaigning is difficult.

"You have to work hard, and once you get elected don't sit back and take it for granted," said Coun. Spooner. "And never make a promise you can't keep. Be very careful on what you promise."

Port Hope Deputy Mayor Jeff Lees, Port Hope's longest serving municipal politician with 13 years, warned those first entering the political arena that municipal politics is incredibly time consuming. In a small community, local politicians can't get away from the issues.

"Go for it, if you've got 40 or 50 or 60 hours to spare with all the grief you can take," Deputy Mayor Lees said. "It starts at 6:05 a.m. and doesn't end till you go to sleep. It never stops. Some people, nothing makes them happy."

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This is Part 3 of our 'Make a Difference' series, aimed to create involvement in municipal politics, leading up to the October, 2010, municipal election.

FAST FACTS

Northumberland's most-tenured politicians

- Port Hope: Deputy Mayor Jeff Lees, 13 years, first elected in 1997.
- Cobourg: Councillor Bob Spooner, 25 years, first elected in 1985.
- Hamilton Township: Councillor Pat McCourt, 11 years, first elected in 1996 (missed a term between 2003 and 2006).
- Alnwick/Haldimand Township: Mayor Bill Finley, 33 years, first elected in 1977.
- Municipality of Trent Hills: Councillor William Thompson, 23 years, first elected in 1987.
- Brighton: Councillor Chuck Ward, 21 years, first elected in 1989.
- Cramahe Township: Deputy Mayor Jim Williams, 16 years, first elected in 1990 (missed a term between 2003 and 2006).