

A Day in the Life: Guelph/Eramosa Mayor Chris White

By: Vivien Fleisher

Mayor Chris White likens the job of Mayor to a bit of a puzzle: “Everything touches on other things.” He’s on many boards and committees: AMO, ROMA—both in Toronto—GRCA, Board of Health, and county councillor—chair of finance, there too. It makes your head spin, but the highly energetic Mayor says the pieces are all inter-related and he’s at home in a world where “nothing is consistent except the fact that it’s consistently going.” The cross-pollination allows him to interface with ministers and advance other files and makes him more effective in his role by getting him out of the strictly-local silo. “In the old days, it was ‘plow the roads and go home,’” he says, citing the proximity of the GTA as a big factor, where more time goes into planning than ever before. From a tiny municipality to one that required a full-time mayor, Guelph/Eramosa Township (GET) did not amalgamate until 1999, causing angst amongst residents concerned by the attendant staffing expansion alone. Before the Township office in Bruceville was expanded eight years ago, they were so

short on space a trailer was needed to house three staff. The Township doubled in geographical size and nearly in population—8,000 to 13,000. A lot more planning legislation, services, asset management, clerking to handle licensing, etc. followed. To keep a lid on costs, the reno did not include a mayor’s office.

On this day, Mayor White is up at 7:30 a.m., working out of his home office answering emails and scheduling meetings and events. Without an assistant or office, home is often his base. He usually arrives at the Township by 10:30 a.m., giving staff time to get their days started. Today he’s there at 10 a.m. for a meeting in council chambers with Wellington County and the public to determine what kind of services “Older Adults” would like to see in their community. It’s over quickly however; no public shows up. He then does the rounds—every other day he touches base with staff—chatting with Parks and Rec’s Robin Milne, Public Work’s Harry Niemi, and finishing up in CAO Ian Roger’s office, where they

discuss upcoming items. White carries on the humour about the upcoming “lame duck” period, where the CAO runs the show during the run-up to the election this fall.

Today is not typical—the schedule is light—so he uses the rest of it preparing for the next one, which will begin at 9 a.m. with a development charges meeting at town offices; a 1 p.m. budget meeting in Puslinch; a 3 p.m. event at Wellington County Museum; and a 4 p.m. Board of Health meeting in Guelph, where he sits on behalf of the County. Two or three scheduled events a day is average.



Back to today. Before heading out, he files his papers for Mayor, having secured 25 signatures. Now in his third term, he’s been at GET for 14 years, starting as Ward 4 councillor. His background travelling as a quality manager prepared him for a lot of time on the road and lunch on the fly, which he does on route to the County Office in Guelph to talk about the Xinyi



Parks and Rec planner Robin Milne



ROTARY GALA: Power outages Friday evening, didn’t hold up the Rotary Club of Acton’s Annual Spring Gala and Auction. The tables at the Town Hall Centre were filled to capacity and the bidding was strong. - Les Schmidt photo

glass plant proposal; a big public meeting in Marden next week promises to be lively, and there’s lots of prep to do. The rest of the day involves smaller items: he helps some residents determine who’s responsible for a lot line dispute in a development.

Its afternoon now; he works on GRCA files. They’re winding down their rental housing program, with three severances coming up at council.

His schedule is very fluid with two or three big things that flow along like the Hidden Quarry application, and the Xinyi Glass plant proposal. He only started using social media during the last election, using Facebook to stay accessible throughout



Last stop CAO Ian Roger’s office.

the day. He stops around 9 p.m., barring a major issue, but never turns off his phone.

His advice to would-be mayors: be careful of burnout, pace yourself and keep things in perspective by seeing the other person’s point of view. His rule for really stressful situations: wait 24 hours before responding.

The hardest part of his job? “When things come out of the blue that you can’t control, like stuff designated at the provincial level that impact individuals locally.” But he loves his job. A lifelong passion for politics has led him to this moment, where he can actually get things done instead of watching from the sidelines, adding, “This job is what you make it.”



Mayor White with Ward 3 Councillor Louise Marshall at the Firehall on Saturday.

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