

NEW MAYOR READY FOR CHALLENGES AHEAD

PROTECTING TOWN'S CHARACTER AMID DEVELOPMENT PRESSURES A TOP PRIORITY, SAYS LAWLOR

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"Small town living at its best" is a Halton Hills reality new mayor-elect Ann Lawlor says she aims to uphold into the future.

"People feel very strong connections to where they live and I think one of the ways we're able to do that in Halton Hills is because we have small neighbourhoods that are very cohesive," Lawlor said. "It's really important to maintain those neighbourhoods and to recognize

they are separate and distinct and that's a lot of what makes them strong," she added.

With former mayor Rick Bonnette's retirement and after serving as town councillor for 12 years, Lawlor — an avid community volunteer and Halton Hills resident of four decades — stepped up to the mayoral race.

From a young age, Lawlor said she developed a fascination with government and the impact it can have on people. As a student, she interned with different levels of government and went on to earn a master's degree in public administration.

"Municipal government is the government that is closest to the people. It touches every single person in the community, every single day," said Lawlor.

Having now served as mayor for a few weeks, Lawlor said the switch from the part-time position of a councillor to a full-time responsibility has kept her busier than expected and that there's plenty to look forward to.

Looking to the future, Lawlor said several pieces of new provincial legislation and regulations could threaten citizen participation, years of planning processes, natural heritage protection, climate action and heritage preservation, if not dealt with caution.

"Bill 23 and Bill 109 actually introduce huge financial challenges for the municipality," Lawlor said. "These announcements immediately following the election set me back on my heels."

The two bills combined aim at building more



Ann Lawlor photo
New Mayor Ann Lawlor is ready to face the challenges ahead, including development.

homes for everyone faster. "Potentially Bill 23 could lead to sprawl, which will erase those special characteristics and distinct communities that are so important," said Lawlor. "The province is also taking away development charges for some types of housing (Bill 109), which means a significant

source of income that we have in order to finance that growth is being taken away," she added.

Lawlor said further provincial action will take land out of the precious Greenbelt. She added the province has significantly revised the Halton Region Official Plan and the Halton Hills urban boundary by 2051 and will shift significantly south to develop thousands more acres, which are currently farmlands.

The ongoing project of Vision Georgetown offers 1,000 acres of development land in the south-west corner of Georgetown, which aims to welcome approximately 20K people into the community over the next decade — something Lawlor approaches with optimism.

Lawlor said through Vision Georgetown, she aims to create another tightly-knit neighbourhood supporting community spirit and connected-

ness — similar to Halton Hills' other smaller settlements such as Glen Williams, Stewarttown, and Norval.

"A sense of this is very much not sprawl. Those central cores, the gathering places for people with a critical mass of recreational centres, those kinds of structures are really important for that," said Lawlor.

The aim is to add to the unique character of Halton Hills, not take away from it, said Lawlor. She also shared appreciation for the town's volunteer community and non-profit groups that "move mountains" and are vital to support, as she likes to remind the public.

"We live in a beautiful community and we want to make sure we maintain the natural and agricultural environment that is mixed with our urban centres — that urban-rural mix is really important to us," she concluded.

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