DUFFY, AL

MONTH IN REVIEW

What makes Al Duffy run?

AL DUFFY

No one can run Richmond Hill but Al Duffy.

Duffy is too smart, politically, to say that, but there was no doubt after a lengthy interview, just before the municipal election, that he believes it. Why else would he risk his new career in the land development business, to try to win back his old job as the hands-on mayor of Richmond Hill?

There could be no greater contrast in management style than one between the ex-mayor, Duffy, and the incumbent for the last three years, Mayor Bell. While Duffy treats each development deal as if it were a personal offspring, Bell's approach is collegial – a team approach, as in the teacher's lounge. In debate, he listens to other points of view, and tries to be fair, even to Duffy.

Duffy's platform is simple. He will cancel the deal to purchase an office building in Beaver Creek for a town administrative centre, and there will be no tax increases for two years.

Bell, on the other hand, would like the new building to be the centrepiece of a conservative, business-like administration.

Duffy claims that the Town spent a huge amount – about $670,000 – on fees for the forensic audit of the Town finances, after deputy treasurer Tom Taylor had gone to the mayor and confessed to defrauding Richmond Hill.

But his major beef is that the past council wrecked earlier deals – for example on the civic centre site at Major Mackenzie Drive and Yonge Street. One of the biggest developers in Canada was let off the hook; it was supposed to build a hotel, office and retail space, and underground parking, to be connected to public buildings by a glass atrium. "The private development would pay the cost of operating the public buildings."

The developer completed all the subdivisions between May Avenue and Major Mackenzie Drive, and got out of providing $14 million in infrastructure, Duffy claims, while the Town bought the whole civic centre site.

Bell also let Richmond Hill Centre Ltd. out of commitments to start the Jail Farm development with industrial or commercial buildings before putting up anything residential, Duffy claims. The commercial assessment is needed to offset the cost of providing services to York Region residents.

The co-op housing in the northeastern section of the Jail Farm site is now totally surrounded by industrial zoning. Bell claims the plan was forced on it as the affordable housing component in the Jail Farm in order to get the whole plan approved. Duffy says the developers should have been forced to use some of the land on which they wanted to put 4,000 sq. ft. houses instead, and it is inevitable that more land will be rezoned for housing to link the co-op with other residential areas.

Duffy was angered to receive a letter from the law firm representing the Jail Farm consortium, soliciting campaign contributions for "our friend" Bill Bell. "I always did my own fund-raising," says Duffy.

He presided over Richmond Hill's most spectacular period of subdivision approval, but he now thinks the whole approach to planning, a 1960s approach, should be overhauled for the 1990s. The Queensville plan which he is promoting is one in which people will be able to walk to the nearest plaza. Streets should be laid out to connect for future bus routes.

His own house, which he built while he was mayor, on the edge of a ravine in a new Town subdivision, he says now is not in a well-planned location. "This house is designed to be driven to. When I am too old to drive, I will have to sell out."

Despite a provincially-commissioned report to the contrary, Duffy says the planning department was not understaffed when he was mayor. It may seem that way, because council keeps sending back the same plans for further reports, when there is nothing more to be said.

Neither was the finance department undermanned, he claims, despite the Ernst and Young interim report, which followed a ministry of municipal affairs study, noting inadequate checks and balances. The recommendations for more staff in treasury and computer systems have been carried out. Duffy believes the Town is overstaffed for current economic conditions, particularly in such areas as planning and building.

Yet former school trustee Jane Robertson is running for council, partly to improve relations between the board and the Town so that permits will no longer be held up to the point where school boards start construction without them.

Duffy also was accused of building his own house without a permit in a controversy which erupted in *The Globe and Mail* in 1988. He would claim, in another newspaper, that the permit was misplaced by the Town; so he had to pay for it twice.

Others felt cheated when they went to purchase houses in his subdivision and were told that the ravine lot they wanted was reserved; that would later be the site of Duffy's dream home which became a bit of a nightmare. He became the focus of stories of political and staff links across York Region with the Region's major developers, and Duffy would lose the 1988 election to Bell.

"I'm glad I lost, if I had to, before getting my name cleared."

After an extensive police investigation,

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