

## A New Beginning Mayor Altmann takes stock



By Sarah Newton

I recently sat down with Mayor Justin Altmann to gain insight into the new town council.

Supporters have been onside with Mayor Altmann since early on, acknowledging his political efforts and taking him under their wing. "I think people were excited to see someone so young so interested and they really got behind my dream of being mayor," he said.

Some have argued that a vote split between seasoned councillors Richard Bartley and Phil Bannon contributed to his victory, but he sees it differently.

"Mr. Bannon and Mr. Bartley are polar opposites, with Phil being popular among the Whitchurch-Stouffville business community and Richard enjoying the support of the hockey families. Arnold Neufeld-Fast also won a thousand votes that may have otherwise been mine. Everyone's vote is unique, so this will make an interesting polling question later on."

The last council was sometimes criticized for acting out of sync with the will of the community and many have placed high hopes on Mayor Altmann to restore people's faith by being a mayor who truly listens.

To heal the rift, Altmann plans to deliver "concise, community-oriented responses" and hopes his fellow council members will "become public figures again" by coming out to more events and publicizing a list of those they will be

attending.

He acknowledged that social media serves a good purpose locally when used judiciously, and is committed to "encouraging councillors to mentor and monitor conversations on social media platforms so that they will keep abreast of discussions and encourage respectful dialogue."

Among the first to congratulate former mayor Wayne Emmerson in his new position as York Regional Council (YRC) Chair, Mayor Altmann said that while "it's nice to have a chair that understands our goals, I would also like to see, Wayne Emmerson increase his lobbying efforts toward Whitchurch-Stouffville receiving another permanent seat on the York Regional Council."

YRC's ultimate decision to grant Whitchurch-Stouffville a second seat will be based on growth projections determined by the Council's 2015 regional review of the greenbelt, he said.

"There are many plans awaiting approval during that process that will drastically alter our position and I plan on participating in that conversation."

The Mayor is looking forward to negotiating sustainable development strategies during the proceedings, which could result in 150,000 new residents moving into York Region.

He expressed a keen interest in working with his municipal, provincial and federal partners to accomplish ongoing construction of bus rapidways and subways

into York Region, to increase waste diversion capacities and to improve broadband strategies, while staying tuned in to his campaign commitments toward homelessness prevention.

Mayor Altmann observed that he is taking the reins at a very interesting time, with the provincial government being relatively new and a federal election on the slate next year. He has already reached out to both offices and looks forward to some frank and open exchanges.

The Mayor plans to continue fostering the growth in local arts programming that was spear-headed by former Ward 4 Councillor Susanne Hilton during the previous term, noting that he "definitely supports community culture. Art helps people relax; it enriches us and offers us balance."

He hopes the new council will contribute funding for arts programs and help raise awareness about the importance of art in civic life. He will also focus on ensuring that there is proper leadership from council members on arts and culture-oriented committees.

While Mayor Altmann admits to being fiscally conservative, with liberal perspectives on culture, the environment and social programs, he most enjoys the non-partisan nature of local politics, where it's about "making direct contact. You can get work done and experience the results."

Sarah Newton is a local freelance writer

Mayor Justin Altmann and friends take part in the Stouffville Santa Claus parade on Dec. 6.

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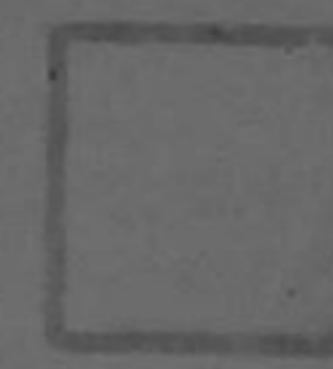
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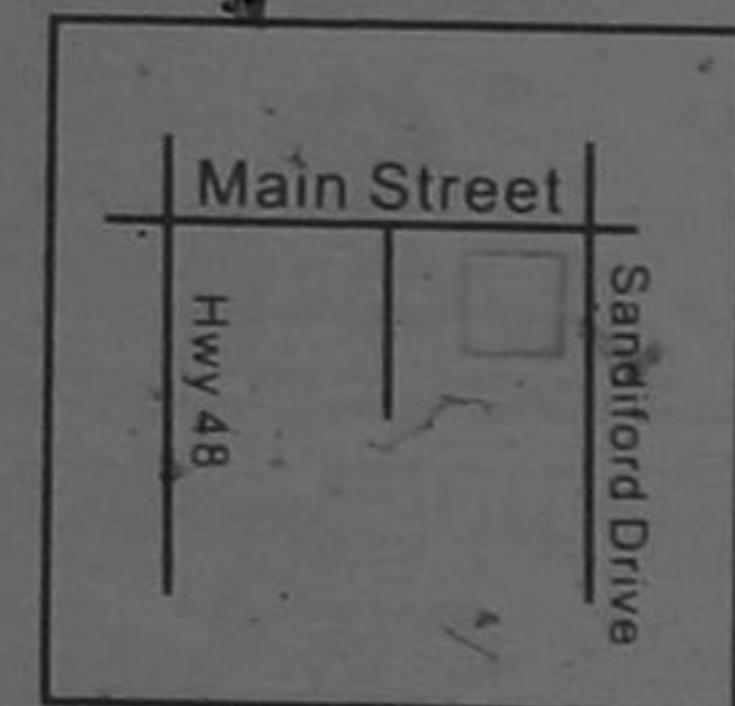
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