

Local realtor Sandy Brown confirms candidacy for Orangeville mayoralty



By Mike Pickford

Orangeville Mayor Jeremy Williams is in for a fight this fall after local realtor Sandy Brown, who ran unsuccessfully for deputy mayor in 2014, today signaled his intent to run for mayor in October's municipal election.

It's been a big six months for Mr. Brown as he contemplated whether to make another run for public office. Convinced that the municipality needs a change of leadership, Sandy promises to get the community "back on track" should he be elected in the October 22 vote.

"We need people involved who really have the Town at heart and what's best for the community and its residents at heart," Mr. Brown said. "As much as I'm sure Mayor Williams is working hard, it's hardly working under him right now. I think this community desperately needs somebody to stand up, take responsibility and work for the betterment of this community. I think I can be that person."

Having secured 2,500 votes in a three horse race for deputy mayor in 2014, finishing some 700 votes shy of Warren Maycock, Sandy acknowledges he has a lot of work to do over the next few months to win the community over.

The best way to do that, in his opinion, is by presenting an effective platform. While he readily admits he won't be reinventing the wheel, Mr. Brown feels he has a few ideas that can help the municipality through the next four years.

First off, he would like to see the OPP/OPS debate reopened so as to carry out a "complete and thorough analysis of all the numbers" so that Council can make one final, informed decision. He'd like Town Staff to reach out to three municipalities that have recently constructed new fire halls - Georgetown, Stayner and Collingwood - to discuss the process and, eventually, develop a plan for a new fire hall in Orangeville.

"Everything presented to Council has already been done, and done well, somewhere else," Mr. Brown said. "I think it's Council's job to cherry-pick the best ideas from what's already gone on out there. I certainly think that's a better option than spending tens of thousands of dollars on consultants' reports."

Economic development, affordable housing and taxation are also at the forefront of Mr. Brown's platform. He would like to see the Town "taking better care" of its current business community, while creating an attractive place where new businesses could be confident in investing.

"One of the big issues I'd like to tackle is the taxation of businesses in Orangeville. Our industrial taxes in town are roughly 80 percent more than in Collingwood, 64 percent more than in Alliston. Is land value here different from Collingwood and Alliston? I would suggest not a lot. Council sets these rates, I'm sure there are incentives we can give to help bring some more development to town."

Attracting more industry to Orangeville would be a big win for residential taxpayers, who right now are shouldering much of the municipality's tax burden. Reading off numbers from the Town's latest budget, Mr. Brown says the tax breakdown in Orangeville currently sits at \$1.15 million covered by industry, with residential coming in at \$28 million.

"We can make a significant impact by reducing industrial taxes. We'll be sending out a message to the business community saying

'hey, we're here to support you, not exploit you',? Mr. Brown said.

Regarding affordable housing, Mr. Brown said he'd like to see a program similar to that offered in Peel Region where the municipality offers incentives to homeowners to legalize basement apartments. That program provides applicants with up to \$25,000 to get their basements up to rental standards.

'I know we're a small municipality and implementing something like that might be tough, but it's an idea. We have to take a real look at affordable housing, because it's becoming a real problem in our community. Skilled people are being forced to leave because they cannot afford to live here,'? Mr. Brown said. 'Rental fees have been climbing too. What can we do to encourage developers to build rental apartments in town rather than condos?'

He added, 'There's got to be something we can do as a municipality to help our residents.'

Mr. Brown has lived in Orangeville for 26 years and currently works as a real estate agent with Remax. He is a member of the Orangeville Committee of Adjustment, a member of the Orangeville Lions Club for more than 20 years and a past president of the Orangeville Minor Hockey Association. He has also helped to spearhead such local events as the recent Seven Bridges Run at Island Lake.

'I really, truly love Orangeville. That's why I'm running for Council. I think we need to get rid of the dysfunction we've seen over the past three or four years. While I believe we need a change of leadership, I also think we need a change in the bulk of Council, too. We need to see some fresh thoughts and ideas,'? Mr. Brown said.

In one of his more controversial points, Mr. Brown said he'd like to see the library at the Alder Recreation Centre permanently closed.

'If you were to look at the City of Toronto, they have 100 public libraries in an area of 675 square miles for a population of three million people in metro Toronto. That's one library for every 30,000 people and seven square miles,'? Mr. Brown said. 'We're about seven square miles here in town and we're about 30,000 people. Yet we have two libraries. Basically, we have twice as many libraries for our people as the City of Toronto has for its people.'

He added, 'Why do we have two libraries? No town of this size has two libraries. We have small town charm, but some of this big city excess that someone has, for some reason, brought to the table. We need to right-size certain departments and I'd like to see us look at this as a way to potentially save a bit of money.'

On the point of saving money, Sandy brought up the possibility of developing a smart phone app to replace other forms of informing the public about locations and events across town. He also believes the municipal website needs a complete overhaul.

It's a lengthy shopping list, but one he believes he can productively chip away at should he be successful in ousting Mayor Williams in October. While the current mayor has yet to officially submit his papers, he went on the record to tell the Citizen last year that he would be seeking re-election.

'It's going to be something of a fight, that I'm fully prepared for. I'm looking forward to debating a number of issues,'? Mr. Brown said. 'You have to look at Jeremy's record over the past three or four years and, based on his campaign platform from 2014, not a lot has happened. His promises of a zero percent tax increase never happened.'

He added, 'When you look at some of the things Jeremy has been involved in, his attendance at Dufferin County Council has been questionable, he was removed as chair of the Orangeville Police Services Board, there have been investigations by the police and integrity commissioner and I think everyone can see there are issues on Council.'

He added, 'I believe we need to restore integrity and collaboration and transparency into the Council chamber. I think I represent each of those things, and represent them well. I would work hard to bring about the change I believe this community so desperately needs and deserves.'