

Speech to Rotary September 10, 2014

Good morning Rotary South Georgian Bay Members and Guests. President Oosterveld it is a privilege for me to speak once again to a Club whose members contribute so often and selflessly to the principle of "Service Above Self".

Colleen and I are regular attendees of Taste of the Town and it always a great event. I rather enjoyed this year's, not to sunny so my thinning hair was not a problem for sunburn.

I played the Georgian Bay Club in the Tim Horton's Tournament, my first time and I played in large part because I rather admire the community work all of do.

This is the first official campaign speech for me so I thank you for this special opportunity.

There are some faces here this morning that I do not recognize so just a brief history. I like so many residents moved here as a teenager to this wonderful Town.

I have served as an elected official in Collingwood for 4 consecutive terms, 3 as a Municipal Councillor (1997-2006) and 1 term as Mayor of Collingwood (2006-2010).

I am asking the community to bring me back as their Mayor for the 2014 term of Council.

The 2006-2010 Council that I served as Mayor saw the residents of Collingwood receive good value for their taxes paid.

A Value Proposition says that what you get is worth what you pay and while no one really likes to pay taxes, Collingwood got a great deal of value for our share of dollars invested into our community from 2007-2010.

Collingwood is fortunate to have a full time Police and Fire Service to protect our families and our property.

Many communities do not have the same high level of protection of their citizens and their property.

However this level of protection does come with a price tag and in our case Policing costs represent 22% and Fire protection represents 16% of our own purpose municipal budget.

It will require cooperation between the Provincial government and local governments to manage the arbitration system that continues to fail to recognize

1. The community's ability to pay and
2. That retention pay (commonly referred to as 3-6-9) or tenure pay is not an issue for many Ontario communities including Collingwood.

The Team I led as Mayor had a proven track record of strong partnerships with all levels of government. We can do so again.

As we age, knees are replaced, hips, pacemakers the new technologies to replace our worn out bodies is pretty spectacular.

Well Collingwood is old too, we celebrated its 150th Anniversary in 2008 and during the 2006-2010 Council we continued to replace our aging

infrastructure both waste water and storm sewers, First Street, Hurontario Street to name but a few projects.

We could have chosen not to spend and see our assets continue to decay. Some councils did just that and the failure to invest in replacing infrastructure that often times were over 100 years old required the 2006-2010 Council to have to spend a great deal of money.

Some our taxpayers may not have liked that and certainly the campaigning in the 2010 election of the communities debt levels was great political theatre and resulted unfortunately for some of my former colleagues who made the best choice for Collingwood paying too high a political price because the simple messaging that the debt had ballooned by triple while effective was NOT and I repeat was NOT Fact Checked.

The debt from 2006 to 2010 doubled from 22 million dollars to 44 million dollars.

Now that still sounds pretty bad!

What you were not told is that some of that debt, 11 Million Dollars of that Debt, HALF was a result of decisions made in early 2006 by the previous council however the financing came due in 2007 and 2008.

In fact let us play the bad politics game, this current Council as one of their first acts approved over 10 million dollars of new debt and yet they will tell you they have decreased the debt yet ignore their first act was to increase it the debt by 10 million dollars.

I will accept the truth they approved the debentures necessary for capital spending done by a previous council while acknowledging so did the council I served as Mayor.

If I was in a 2 team hockey tournament with my opponents and I finished first, the language you would have heard was that they finished second and I finished next to last. If they finished first then they won and I lost is the language that you would have heard.

Okay, let me give you a real example, the 2013 budget increase was 1.91%. That is true. What is also true the tax increase, the part you pay was 4.43%. Now which number did we hear more often?

The language of politics is often confusing and purposely meant to lead you to an emotional response of not liking one candidate over another. Why confuse you with facts.

I dislike that kind of politics. I would much prefer to discuss with you the good business reasons for the decisions that were made and will be made by a future council if once again I have the privilege to serve above self as your Mayor.

The ability of our Council of 2006-2010 to finance some of our investment in our aging infrastructure at historic 30 year low interest rates softened the negative impact of carrying the additional debt and that was a good business decision.

I would like to point out that we had great success in leveraging local tax dollars through grants and contributions from other levels of government. This occurred as a result of a strategic plan, and much hard work by my

elected colleagues, our senior staff our Economic Development Officer and others to establish and build relationships based on trust with both the Provincial and Federal Government, the private sector and not for profit organizations.

The proof is in numerous staff reports and documents and if you want them email me and I can send them to you.

Collingwood received over 20 million dollars of other investment dollars from our strategic partnerships that did NOT come from our local tax payers pockets.

Let me put it this way, you need to buy a home for your family and you have it planned to buy a home in 2 years and you will put a small down payment and finance the rest. Well what if someone else paid 60% down and you were able to finance the remainder at 30 year low interests rates. The council I led did accelerate some capital spending but measured against the long term cost of financing the same projects without limited time offers of monies from elsewhere, it was both the reasoned and responsible choice to make.

Was I concerned about the new debt load the municipality was asking our property tax base to carry?

Of course I was, I am not that insensitive despite what you may hear!

The better question at the time was whether it was a reasonable amount of debt we incurred from 2007 to 2010 considering what needed to be done to narrow our large infrastructure gap (roads and sewers etc.)?

Once again Yes it was both reasonable and responsible. It was a good business decision.

Did I think this municipality could safely carry this amount of debt?

Yes I did, I knew what new assessment from our council and previous councils was coming online to offset the increased operational costs of the new debt; the building department publishes monthly how much development is coming online and more importantly what kind of development (residential, commercial, industrial, institutional; new versus replacement).

It is simply a matter of understanding the information provided to us to be able to accurately forecast when investments can be made to minimize any upward pressure on the property tax base.

The proof is the pudding, subsequent and consistent low tax increases from 2007 onward are a testament to the truth of my assertions that the spending was both reasonable and responsible.

The best money invested is that which will produce a payback. For example, the amount of monies invested in replacing old sewer lines resulted in less storm water infiltrating our pipes and travelling to the waste water treatment plant to be cleaned.

Less storm water requiring cleaning at the plant resulted in our increasing the plant's overall capacity levels, without having to invest in an expensive larger capacity initiative.

And, we are use less energy because we clean more waste -water and not additional storm water.

The thoughtful and practical planning of the 2006-2010 council demonstrated a nice balance of spending on what MUST be done now (e.g. sewer replacement) and what must be done to prepare us to attract jobs in the future (e.g. improved runways at our regional airport, the infrastructure investment for Georgian College and more).

This current Council's spending is in stark contrast to the previous Council. Their political message is a simple one "we did more without raising the debt. In fact we reduced the debt!"

The truth is you the people and business owners who pay the tax bill paid down the debt (thank you).

The selling of 50% of COLLUS allowed this Council the 14 million dollars of financial flexibility to address the demand by various stakeholders for increased ice time and better swimming facilities.

A committee of great community focussed people was struck and their recommendations were completely ignored and Council purchased our two sports fabric membrane structures.

We lost one baseball diamond and a youth soccer pitch in the process.

No other government grants, no other partners that I am aware of, just 13 plus million dollars of legacy funds from the sale of a revenue producing asset (COLLUS) to build 2 bubbles (No Tender Required) that the operational costs are still unknown.

There were other compromise options that were also completely ignored. The outdoor rink was designed and built to include footings to allow for walls and a roof structure to be added later.

As recently as 2009 the costs to include brick walls, a real roof, benches, dressing rooms etc. were about 2 million dollars or 4 million dollars less than what they spent on the bubble.

A partnership with an expansion of the YMCA was approved by the council of 2006-2010 that would have seen 1.5 million dollars of reserve transferred to allow for the expansion of the YMCA.

That partnership proposal was cancelled by the current Council and instead they spent several more million dollars tearing down and rebuilding Centennial Pool with the annual operational costs still not fully known.

They spent 10 million more dollars than was necessary to meet the need for more ice time and better aquatic facilities.

NO new debt was incurred for these 2 facilities but my position remains that the selling of a revenue asset to build 2 facilities at separate locations is probably one of the most fiscally irresponsible business decisions I have ever seen local government make.

Was I surprised? Well knowing that in 2004-2005 Sandra Cooper, Rick Lloyd, Ian Chadwick and Mike Edwards reversed a decision of the then council led by Mayor Geddes that saw Collingwood return 8.3 million dollars in grant monies to the Provincial and Federal Governments that would have resulted in a Multi-Use facility being open in 2008 that would have had a new ice pad, a play pool and a new library plus some other smaller amenities, I can't say I was that surprised that the same people who messed it up then outdid themselves this term.

They did not raise the debt, I will give them that but boy oh boy your money could have been spent so much better. I had coffee with Terry last week and he was telling me that if you want to see the multi-use facility we should have had opened in 2008 then visit Bradford West Gwillimbury. Their CAO, our former CAO Jay Currier built there what he had hoped to build here.

The new 2014 Council will need to look for the best way to leverage your tax dollars in order to maximize the return to our community and minimize the amount contributed by you through debt financing thus increasing the need to raise the general tax levy.

There simply has not been the required growth in assessment these past 4 years; revenue streams have been sold, Council has spent much of the reserves on purchasing land that we did not need (the 10th Line property purchase for 2.3 million dollars) and of course their investment of millions of dollars on non-brick and mortar recreational facilities whose extra staffing and inefficient energy designs will continue to harm the bottom line, Collingwood cannot afford to continue with bad decision making from bad decision makers.

You need to bring back to Council a strong Mayor that will ensure the decision making process is a process that does not continue with the current silo style where only a few people know the details, information is guarded and not shared even with all council members.

Collingwood needs an effective Mayor that will bring back the best way to make decisions; a process that values all the 4 pillars of sustainability (economic, social, environmental, and cultural) equally.

Politics during my leadership as Mayor was based upon bringing stakeholders together and forming strategic partnerships for the betterment of our community and that of our neighbours.

I had a trusted hand shake relationship with all of our neighbouring Mayors, members of the Provincial and Federal Governments and I have maintained many of those relationships to this day.

It has never been a scratch my back and I will scratch your back process for me.

That style of decision making leaves you out of the equation and quite frankly you are the only part of the equation that is important.

As Mayor I led Council in a decision making process that was based upon a robust review of information at the Council table in front of our electorate. The meetings were long sometimes but at least you could be confident that is where the decision making took place.

It is extremely difficult to separate the truth from fiction when you do not have the resources or a full understanding of the process to review the decisions being made.

I need to be clear, perfectly clear with you, the decisions I made as Mayor were based upon the information provided to us by our expert staff. I respect our staff and I trust them and from my many conversations with them I know I earned their trust and respect.

My voting record was a result of careful consideration of staff reports and an understanding that difficult situations require complex solution based decisions; ones that may not be popular but you elected me then to put

forward my best judgement and I did. I am very proud of the accomplishments of the 2006-2010 council. We did a very good job managing Collingwood based upon your principle of Service Above Self.

Bring me back as Mayor and I promise you I will lead the Council to a better process for better decisions for the best future for all of us.