

Teamwork is the motto of the new council

By Mark PavilonsEditor

It's often said there is no "I" in "TEAM" and that sentiment was made abundantly clear as the 2022-2026 council assumed their duties. Councillors were sworn in Monday during the inaugural ceremonies with a fitting amount of pageantry. Clerk Denny Timm, in his first official meeting, said it was a day of celebration, to honour history and tradition, while looking toward the future with confidence and hope. "I look forward to serving and working with the Mayor and every member of council in this next term of office," he said. He introduced the councillors, noting Mayor Steve Pellegrini, Debbie Schaefer and Avia Eek are all entering their fourth terms, with the mayor being acclaimed for three straight terms. Justice Peter Tetley, of the Ontario Court of Justice and lifelong King resident, offered his praise for all those who participated in the democratic process during the election. He reflected on King's growth, noting certain constants remain and one of those is the community's expectations of their elected officials. They are the administrators and guardians of "this special place." While residents sometimes question the wisdom of council decisions, it comes with the territory, he said. He administered the oath of office for all councillors. King CEO Dan Kostopoulos said he's worked at King for almost four years and he offered his heart-felt congratulations to councillors. He's confident the community will be well served under their leadership. He said Mayor Pellegrini is "authentic," and that's the "hallmark of good leadership." With the "best mayor around," King will meet all the challenges that are ahead in the coming years. Councillors had a chance to provide some comments as they enter their new term. Ward 1 Councillor Jordan Cescolini thanked his support network of the important people in his life. He expects some exciting work ahead in the next four years and he said he's committed to working with his colleagues in "productive fashion." Ward 2 Councillor David Boyd said he's had an amazing journey the past eight years and he's proud to be part of creating a community that friends and neighbours can be proud of. He thanked staff for helping him grow and learn as a councillor. Ward 3 Councillor Jennifer Anstey said she was thrilled to be part of this "exciting moment," something she worked really hard for. She vowed to be diligent in working towards the goals and issues of concern to her ward residents. Ward 4 Councillor Mary Asselstine said she's honoured and privileged to be working alongside her colleagues in a responsive and responsible manner. She will work to move King toward a sustainable future and she's ready for the challenge. Councillor Schaefer thanked her campaign team and stressed the two most important issues in her ward are traffic and growth. She said she's happy that King has got its "house in order," but admitted there are challenges ahead in light of the Province's recent moves to implement Bill 23 and changes to the Greenbelt, which will impact both residents and municipalities. This drew some loud cheers and applause from like-minded residents in attendance. Councillor Eek stressed the importance of effective government, adding her colleagues should note they are the voice of the people, working for the good of the community. "We are one King," she observed. Eek said her main focus will remain on agriculture, the environment and economic development. "We are a team," she said, stressing she will make residents' priorities her priorities. In his remarks, Mayor Pellegrini said it's an honour to continue to serve, noting he was first elected 22 years ago. "I again intend to work very hard to justify your faith and confidence." The evening was a time to recognize council's accomplishments and welcome "new beginnings." He extended his thanks to the previous council and outgoing councillors Jakob Schneider and Bill Cober. He lauded Township staff and volunteers of the various boards and committees. "You have made the past four years exciting and an absolute pleasure." He stressed this is a team effort and "between residents, business, staff and Council, King will continue to shine as an example of how a great community works together to make King the best place to live, work, and play." "I am confident the new Council of 2022 to 2026 will work together to overcome challenges and collaborate on opportunities to continue to make King a highly desirable place to be." The mayor welcomed new councillors Mary Asselstine (Ward 4) and Jennifer Anstey (Ward 3). On the topic of working together, there are four top initiatives that must be completed in our next term, he said. With King's team approach, and the assistance of Council and staff, "I am confident of our success." These initiatives include the completion of the Township-Wide Recreation Centre; investment in King's infrastructure and continuing the paving strategy; continued financial responsibility with proper reserves, and effective and efficient government spending, and advocacy for a hospital here in King. The mayor once again pointed to the new rec. centre as a source of pride and accomplishment. They broke ground this past summer and construction is under way, with an opening set for 2024. The centre will be a state-of-the-art, carbon-neutral, fully accessible recreation complex. "We are thankful for the partnership with our federal and provincial government partners, and Seneca." King continues to make capital improvements to local infrastructure. This includes park and trail redevelopment, drainage improvements, watermain and sewer upgrades, stormwater works, and bridge and culvert rehabilitation. "In King, we are committed to continuing to work with the private sector to ensure our residents and businesses have the Internet access they need for the work and personal

usage. Since 2019, there has been a 47-per-cent increase in homes with access to newly available broadband," Pellegrini said. The paving of local roads in King is a priority. From 2019 to 2021, more than 36 kilometres of roads went from gravel surface to paved surface, and another 58 kilometres were upgraded with asphalt improvements and surface treatments, and nine more kilometres of road were scheduled for improvements in 2022. The mayor said he's proud of the Townships' financial record and responsibility. Council approved a 0.75-per-cent increase in the Township's portion of the 2022 budget, maintaining a tax increase of close to zero per cent for the Township portion of the annual property tax. The average increase for the Township portion of municipal tax is now 1.11 per cent for the period between 2018 and 2022, positioning King as having one of the lowest tax increases in the GTA. To ensure the Township's ongoing financial health, the annual budget contributes to the Township's reserve funds. The contribution for 2022 is \$7.4 million. The possibility of a new hospital in King is a huge feather in our caps, something the mayor wants to promote. Council passed a resolution to formally request that the Province of Ontario fast-track approval for the new Southlake Regional Health Centre in King. "It is important that we continue to protect the health care of those who live in or near King." The mayor quoted entrepreneur and philanthropist Joe Lonsdale, who said "Good government is one of the most important factors in economic growth and social well-being." "And I totally agree with him. With the King team, I know we can continue to effectively serve the people of King."