

■ OPINION

FORMER COUNCILLOR REFLECTS ON RETURNING TO OFFICE AFTER 30 YEARS

MAN Dec. 20, 2018

DIGITAL COMMUNICATION INCREASES WORKLOAD FOR COUNCILLORS, WRITES DAVE COOK



DAVE
COOK
Column

It is rare indeed that an individual is called back to work 30 years after retiring. But that is exactly what happened to this writer on Feb. 21.

When Mississauga Ward 1 Coun. Jim Tovey passed away Mississauga was faced with either an expensive byelection or filling the position by appointment. Since it was the last year of the four-year term, council decided to appoint.

I was appointed due to my past experience, as I could "hit the ground running" as they say, and I quickly got down to work. As an example, being appointed at 1 p.m. I was in my office within an hour. My schedule laid out for me, a homeowner's meeting that night, Peel regional council first thing the next morning and on and on it went, coun-

cil, general committee, planning and a number of regular meetings such as arts and culture, audit, environmental advisory, governance and government relations. In addition, I was appointed to the board of directors of the Port Credit BIA, Living Arts Centre, Heritage Mississauga and Credit Valley Conservation. The work came back to me as if I had only been away for a short holiday, not 30 years.

Since the province mandated that after the first of July, council could only oversee "house keeping" matters which would be handled by senior staff, everything of major importance was then jammed into the short time period between my nomination and the first week of July.

One might think that the summer would be laid back and not much work to do. But, this is the time for major festivals. As councillor for Ward 1, which is the home of Memorial Park in Port Credit, the summer was filled with events such as Rib Fest, South Side Shuffle, Canada Day and Paint the Town Red to mention a few. Virtually every weekend there is an event or gathering in Ward 1 or at Civic Centre.

When I was elected 38 years ago, the city had very

few celebratory events. Absolutely nothing of today's magnitude was ever held at the original city hall and a councillor's time was on constituency matters in addition to city hall meetings. The members did not have executive assistants and administrative assistants as they do now. Today, a councillor could literally not handle the workload without such staff assistance.

One of the main differences between then and now, which did catch me off guard, is the cellphone, computer and emails. They simply did not exist in my early days. Everything was done by mailed letters and telephone calls. Councillors in my first two years had the assistance of a part time secretary who would only answer the telephone and handle the letters and messages to city staff. Now, the computer and cellphones generate the workload. In eight months my office handled more than 8,000 emails.

But what hasn't changed is the satisfaction of serving the constituents and providing the needed assistance to the electorate.

Dave Cook served as Ward 7 councillor from 1980-1988. He returned in 2018 to fill the interim position as Ward 1 councillor.