

Hagar named Hastings Highlands new Mayor



By Nate Smelle

Since Hastings Highlands' former mayor Vic Bodnar abruptly resigned on Wednesday, March 31, the municipality's former deputy mayor Tracy Hagar has been serving as acting Mayor until a permanent replacement was named. In hope of serving as Hastings Highlands' next Mayor, both Hagar and Councillor Tony Fitzgerald put their names forward for the position.

During the special meeting of council held on Wednesday, May 12, each of the two candidates had the opportunity to: make a 10-minute campaign speech, answer questions from their fellow council members; and, make a closing statement.

Upon listening to the candidates' pitches, council voted to appoint Hagar as the next Mayor of Hastings Highlands. Following the announcement of the vote, Fitzgerald offered his congratulations and support to the new mayor, stating, "I just wanted to take this opportunity to congratulate Tracy on her appointment as Mayor. My words about teamwork earlier were not just words. When Vic Bodnar, our former mayor was made mayor, I promised him my full support - and I did that till the minute he left. I also pledge my full support to you as our mayor; and, I look forward to working with you and getting as much done as we can for the benefit of the people who elected us. Congratulations!"

While campaigning for the position, Hagar explained to council how her experiences as a community volunteer, gas station attendant, local business owner, and deputy mayor have enabled her to lead the municipality for at least the next year and a half.

"In 1997, I started working at one of our local gas stations," said Hagar. "Then, seven years later, I began working at the other local gas station and general store for 15 years. Doing these two jobs I was able to get to know most of the folks in our community. Then I began my own business, and that has been successful. Over the past 10 years I have learned the key to success is communication and listening to your customers."

Through her volunteer experience, and a year of sitting in on council meetings, Hagar said she learned the in-and-outs of municipal governance. In 2010, she decided to run for council, however she was unsuccessful. Four years later, Hagar ran again and earned her first seat on council. In 2018, she won again, unseating former deputy mayor Gregg Roberts.

As Mayor, Hagar promised to do the best she can, and to make herself available. Further expressing her intention to as mayor, she continued, "I promise to keep the lines of communication open to my peers, staff, and ratepayers. I will continue to grow and I will continue to learn."

Throughout the past month while serving as acting mayor, Hagar said she has: attended eight meetings at the county level; sat in on

two extra local board meetings; chaired all the municipality's regular council meetings, as well as attended regular committee meetings. Noting how she is comfortable with her colleagues on Hastings County council, Hastings Highlands staff, and the community, she added, "What I have learned from the success of my business I will apply to Hastings Highlands to continue to make it a success as well. I am honest, hard-working, and most of all, I am approachable. I love challenges, making a bad situation turn good, and, most of all, I love teamwork."

When asked by Councillor Tammy Davis what she considered to be "the number one challenge" Hastings Highlands is facing, Hagar said there are several, however, the one that stands out above the rest for her is the ongoing issue of how to regulate the keeping of exotic animals. Hagar answered, "Right now believe our number one challenge is probably - there's several - but I'm going to say the exotic animals. I believe we need to move forward in a cautious educated way and make sure we do what's best for the municipality as a whole, for the ratepayers, and the animals that are in our municipality."

In order to build and lead a "cohesive team," Hagar said "the key is communication." Acknowledging how communication has often been a focus in many of her political speeches, she stressed the importance of keeping the lines of communication open, and flowing back and forth between council, the head of council, the head of staff, the municipality, ratepayers, and the media.

According to Hagar, the half hour spent sitting in the waiting room, awaiting council's decision was one of the longest half hours in her life. Thanking council for their support after finding out she had been appointed mayor, she said, "I know we have a good team here, and I know we will work good together as we have in the past. We are improving our relationships with everybody; and, Tony, thank you to you as well for putting your name forward, and taking the chance to try and move forward. Thank you everybody. I really appreciate your support."