

Wollaston's Mayor Shaw abruptly resigns

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By Nate Smelle

Monday morning, residents of Wollaston Township learned that Mayor Barbara Shaw had decided to leave her position on council to, as the township's announcement states, "pursue opportunities elsewhere." Shaw was elected in 2018, after narrowly defeating Wollaston's former reeve Graham Blair by just 74 votes. The announcement comes as a surprise for many residents, considering Shaw still had two years remaining in her first term as mayor.

Shaw explains in a press release published on the township's website on Nov. 2, that although COVID-19 has not impacted her personal physical health, it has taken a toll on her financial well-being. Citing challenges created by the pandemic as the main reason for vacating her seat on council, Shaw states "My business, like many others across our region, has started to struggle as a result of the changes that this pandemic has brought. A bleak financial forecast has prompted me to pursue new contracts and sadly, this will be taking me outside of the community more and more of the time."

Shaw asserted that when she took on the role of mayor the flexibility of her work schedule meant that she could serve the community while juggling other commitments "in a more reasonable manner." Admitting that this experiment in multi-tasking was never easy, she said when she took on the role it was still possible. Pointing to the pandemic, Shaw said "COVID-19 has changed this and now, instead of being able to do everything I ever dreamed of from my home community of Coe Hill, I had to make some sacrifices."

Acknowledging how difficult decisions had always been part of the job of governing such a "special community," Shaw indicated how it was with this in mind that she decided to cut her service to the township short. Describing her service to the community as an "honour," and her decision to leave as "a painful choice to make," she said she plans to remain active in the community as a stakeholder.

At the special meeting of council held Nov. 3, council declared the seat for Mayor vacant and unanimously appointed the township's former deputy mayor Lynn Kruger as Shaw's replacement. Councillor Tim Conlin will move into the position of Deputy Mayor. The vacancy on council created by Shaw's resignation and the subsequent shuffle will be filled by a community member chosen by senior municipal staff. The township confirmed that additional information regarding who will fill this position will be made available to the public in the coming weeks.