

## Small Town Mayor

Every four years an election is held in our town to elect a Mayor and six councilors. These elected officials step up to serve the community with the responsibility of public trust associated with issues that rise along the way. A mayor is a reasonably high-profile position with the responsibility of making decisions to maintain public trust. The word trust is one to be treasured, as once trust is broken, it is difficult to regain. The current Mayor and Council are big on trust, ensuring that the operations and projects stay within budget. The town operates primarily on revenue from tax dollars. The town does not compete with business for taxpayers' dollars. Primarily the revenue collected comes from the tax base. It is simple, when business comes to the community, additional tax dollars are generated, creating additional jobs which increases the number of people living in the community. When these people build a home or purchase a home, they become a taxpayer. The town benefits in this situation. The town population has been stable since 2019. The next census in 2021 will tell us whether people are staying, leaving or otherwise.

The primary responsibility of the municipality is to ensure that essential services are maintained. This in plain English is public works. The town is responsible for providing clean water and ensuring that the sewage is disposed of and managed properly. Keeping the streets in good repair and drivable condition is another responsibility of the town. Public safety is equally important, with 17% of the tax dollars are allocated towards policing. These services are provided based on tax dollars that are collected from business and home owners residing and operating within the Town of The Pas boundaries. Although the town funds the RCMP and have a strong reporting system in place, they do not fall within the flow chart of the town employees.

A secondary responsibility, after public works and policing is parks and recreation. Now more than ever, the town is recognizing the need for outdoor spaces where community can gather while staying socially distanced and safe.

The current Mayor and Council have been in office since 2018 and will serve until 2022. It will not be long until another election will take place, with the opportunity for new candidates to officially register their candidacy. Elected officials have many responsibilities, duties, and obligations, bound by the Manitoba Municipality Act and provincial regulations. If elected, your actions will be scrutinized by multiple viewpoints, perspectives, laws, municipal and provincial legislature. Mayor and council work within these structures, cultivating and generating further relations to make progress and plans for the future. It is wise to do your research prior to getting involved in local politics.

This story is a glimpse into the life of a small-town mayor and his perspective on serving the community. Herb Jaques is currently the Mayor for The Town of The Pas. He was elected in 2006 to 2010 on the council and put his name forth again in 2018. He won the head of the council with 603 votes, a 46% turnout of eligible voters. His campaign was based on building community pride and community spirit. Herb felt that he had something to offer the community. He recognized the importance of being a community volunteer early on in life. He spent 8 years volunteering as a fire fighter with the town fire department and another 15 years volunteering with the Northern Manitoba Trappers Festival. He built many wonderful friendships through each volunteer experience. It was within the volunteer work that he met John St. Godard and Gary Hopper who inspired him to get involved at a local political level. In 2006 all three friends ran for council and were elected. This was the start of his journey into Municipal leadership. Herb has said on more than one occasion that being an elected official in a small town is a

unique experience. He says, “you will never look at your town the same way again. The municipal world is completely different than you might think.” Municipal governments are wards of the Provincial Government and are bound by the Assembly of Manitoba Municipalities. He takes his responsibility seriously, always just a call away. He talks daily to many citizens addressing concerns and projects relating to the town in varying degrees of complexity. He likes a good debate and sometimes starts controversial discussion to spark council and community into meaningful discussion. His wife, Kathy, tells him that he is not always right, and he agrees, continuing to stimulate interesting conversation to test what people are really thinking. Debate is an essential part of being a council member. Town Council is responsible for municipal resources that are limited. He commented that many conversations with taxpaying citizens are similar to a mantra; lower taxation, lower crime and increased economic development.

Town Council is proud of their accomplishments to date. While being short staffed without a Chief Financial Officer last summer, they proceeded and delivered the street paving project to the community. They did this staying within the allocated budget and without a CFO. The new pavement brought a sensation of relief, injecting a feeling of wellness back into the community.

The position of Chief Financial Officer was recently filled, taking the time to find the right person for the position. Graham Kaylor, a chartered professional accountant was hired and is working towards keeping the town in good financial standing. Graham will lead the team in reviewing the current parks and recreation structures and spaces and create a plan for future development.

Although there is always room for improvement, Herb believes that the town is heading in the right direction. Town Council has four items on their docket. These being 1) public safety issues, 2) reviewing garbage disposal, landfill, and recycling, 3) parks and recreation improvement and 4) long-term infrastructure reviews. While we have elected these individuals to make decisions for the community, it takes more than just Mayor and Council to keep the community moving forward.

The homeless situation and street people is one of the most discouraging topics that town council is dealing with. It is a complex social issue. Council has contacted various players such as the RHA, the Justice Department, the RCMP, MLA and Swampy Cree Tribal Council and the Province to work on this issue collectively. Herb knows that the town cannot deal with this alone. Provincial and Federal Governments must be involved. As one solution, the town is creating a Community Safety Officer to patrol the downtown business core, as well as enforce bylaws currently in place.

Pre- COVID-19, they were in discussion with Swampy Cree Tribal Council to work towards the issues surrounding the homeless & street people in the downtown business sector. When the pandemic hit the tri community conversations ended as the community focus changed. Every council has surprises that they have to deal with, and this year was no exception. This year has been extremely difficult due to the relentless Corona virus which changed the way that the community, the province, other provinces, and the world operate. There was much fear and confusion brought about by the pandemic. The town worked to provide stable consistent direction, keeping people calm and informed. As the pandemic reached the town in the fall, the town worked with the NRHA and the Province to give accurate information. As Herb says, “It has been an unbelievably difficult year because of onset of COVID-19.

The town is aware that there are better ways to operate the landfill and will be reviewing the current system. This will cover garbage collection to how the landfill operates to recycling. There is much room

for improvement with these current services and they are looking for change. The Pas Recycling Centre is independent from the town but is funded by the Tri-Community and Multi-Material Stewardship Manitoba Inc. It is governed by a board of directors with town council representatives on the board. The town contributes around 150,000.00 towards recycling. The town council will be proposing changes to the structure of the recycling center. The town has some very dedicated recyclers who are not happy with the service in its current state. The town is tackling garbage issues.

Overall, as citizens, we have to stop littering! Litter is an eyesore and causes multiple issues to our environment, wildlife and creatures living in the waterways. Littering is a simple fix; it is the responsibility of each human being to discard your garbage appropriately. Out the window or on the street is not the appropriate place for trash. (this is my comment, not Herb's) I am an opportunist!

COVID-19 has brought to the surface the importance of parks and recreation more than ever. The outdoors is the place that families and people are going to get their fresh air, family time and exercise. The current outdoor skating rink came out of the staff at the Wellness center working with the Fire Department to create a good outdoor experience in the open air of the town. Town employees are collaborating to bring new safe activities for our community. Beyond this, the town will be accessing the current parks and outdoor spaces that they operate to plan for future generations of users.

We do not often think of community infra structure, but it is an essential for maintaining a healthy community. This explains the "why" Council spent time negotiating with the Provincial Government and securing \$66 M towards the lagoon project. The town is responsible for \$5M which will be generated without a tax increase. The lagoon project is anticipated to start this summer. Long term, the Council are working towards a high level infra structure review (water, sewer, and paving) for the entire community. This will determine which areas are deteriorating and need attention on an informed basis. This is truly a long-term project looking far into the future of 20 plus years. Similar to the LaRose Avenue Infrastructure project which now is one of the finest streets to drive down and live on.

Quality of life is important to residents living and working in the municipality of the Town of The Pas. If you look deeper, you will see that The Pas is a shining star. Our town is unique supporting and operating many facilities that promote a high quality of life. These facilities include the Sam Waller Museum, The Pas Regional Library, Kelsey Recreation (Winton Pool, the RH Johnston Arena, the Wellness Center) and The Pas Fire Department. The town also operates The Pas Airport and Lakeside Cemetery. All of these facilities are well maintained. The wellness center is considered exceptional for a town with a population of approximately 5368 (2019 census). The wellness center is unique as NRHA services are available directly housed in the center. Physio staff have access to the wellness center using the center to treat their patients. The Pas Regional Library is also exceptional with many services available for young families and people of all ages and interests. They provide a weekly and daily dose of discovery through books, e books, e-zines, audiobooks, interlibrary loans, and virtual tours on their website. The Sam Waller Museum is designated as a Manitoba Star Attraction. Their website is a worthwhile site to visit, detailing information "From the Vault" featuring items such as excerpts from Sam Waller's diary, dressed fleas, a cree syllabic typewriter and the Franklin sundial. There is much more to explore on the website. [Samwallermuseum.ca](http://Samwallermuseum.ca).

Why do people decide to take on responsibilities serving community, positions such as Mayor and Council? Small towns are all about building community and building relationships with each other. Our small-town mayor and council can lead the way, but it requires many people, groups, and tremendous

collective effort of many to keep a small town growing and sustainable. Herb has not decided if he will run for re-election. Right now, he enjoys the interactions, the work, and the sense of community that he is involved in. He started as a volunteer many years ago. Volunteers are one element in a small town that we can never get enough of. Every volunteer that shows up makes a difference. He would be willing to give it up if someone younger, enthusiastic, and ready to get involved in politics for the right reasons. So, if you are that person, think about what you can do for the community.

The Town of The Pas has recently updated their website with a new look that is easy to navigate and to find information regarding Town of The Pas services, bylaws, meetings, job postings, notifications and much more. ([townofthepas.ca](http://townofthepas.ca))

Thank you, Herb, for two great interviews and a look inside the working life of an elected official. Thank you for your service towards building a better community.

Make Shift Happen.

Written and submitted by Denise Duncan.