

ONE COUNCILOR'S VIEW



By Kevin Gough
Bloomfield Councilor
Then Vote Them Out....

As noted in a recent Messenger cover story, the Bloomfield Democratic Town Committee caucused on July 21 and endorsed its Council slate for the November municipal election.

If you are not already aware, there will again be a Democratic primary for Town Council this year. Mayor Suzette DeBeatham-Brown compiled her own Council slate (which includes incumbents Rickford Kirton and Stephanie Calhoun); no one on that slate – including the Mayor – was endorsed by the town committee.

The primary is a little over five weeks away, on Tuesday, Sept. 14 – watch for lawn signs to sprout like fungus after a rain shortly.

While I did not obtain a spot on the endorsed ticket and will not be returning to Council, I will be working hard to see that the Mayor's slate does not prevail in the primary. Here's why.

I ran with Ms. DeBeatham-Brown (and Mr. Kirton) as part of the 'New Generation of Democratic Leaders' ("Row B") in 2017. The group's slogan for the election was "Choice, Change, Transparency, and Trust." We had an explicit, multipoint platform focusing on issues, e.g.:

- Addressing blight and degrading town infrastructure, including roads, sidewalks, and parks;
- Implementing functional budgeting leading to consolidation/modernization of town services (and potential cost savings to spend money on revitalization initiatives);
- Ending separation of 'town' and 'school' – bring the community into the schools and the schools into the community;
- Development for people, not developers – no more corporate welfare a la Niagara;
- Open, transparent, and

inclusive government.

I remember the turnout on primary day and the thrill at the polls of greeting energized citizens, ready for change and excited to start the long, hard process of revitalizing Bloomfield and making it the vibrant place it has long had the potential to be.

Mayor DeBeatham-Brown, in her role as mayor, has had four years to make good on the vision that the New Generation promised and the voters enthusiastically ratified. Deputy Mayor Mann and I have tried to move forward with policies supporting this vision from the time we were elected. Sadly, the Mayor and her followers not only have failed to do so, they have focused on consolidating the mayor's powers (which are few under our town charter) and interfering with the workings of our town-manager led administration (including, of course, the taxpayer-financed 'voluntary termination' of our previous short-tenure manager). Town government is less transparent, not more. You have less choice, not more.

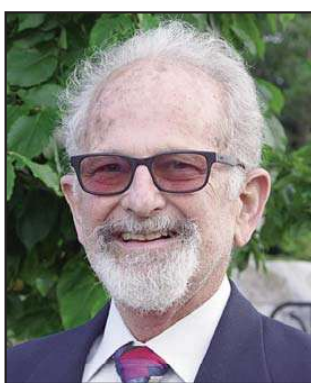
Ms. DeBeatham-Brown's leadership style failed to involve significant input from other Council members; she frequently postured and used intimidation to get what she wanted. She did not seek unity or consensus, so instead of all councilors 'rowing the boat in the same direction' she created division and acrimony. (Her messaging on 'teamwork' is revealing: after two election cycles, she and Mr. Kirton are the only members of her 'teams' that remain.) The vision endorsed by the 2017 "Bloomfield Revolution" (and, I believe, the vision the vast majority of the populace still desires) has made little progress due to lack of interest by the Mayor and her 'team' in this vision, poor leadership, and an identity-driven approach – look at the voting record and lack of accomplishments.

There's an encounter that I've been thinking about a lot the last few months. In 2017, a voter who supported the New Generation Row B slate asked my wife at the polls, "Yeah, this sounds great and I hope it can happen. But what happens if these folks just turn out to behave the same as the ones that they're replacing?" My wife listened and replied, "Then we'll have to vote them out too."

Yep, that's what we've got to do now. Vote them out on Sept. 14.

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WHY I AM NOT RUNNING FOR TOWN COUNCIL



By Davin Mann
Bloomfield Deputy Mayor

I'd like to thank the people of Bloomfield who strongly supported me through two election cycles for Town Council. I am grateful for the opportunity to serve you and all the residents of Bloomfield, but I have decided not to seek re-election this November for some very important reasons.

As a Town Councilor, I view my role as a director of a \$97 million corporation, making decisions to improve and perpetuate the town as a functioning, desirable place to live, work, and invest. The most difficult task as Councilor is to weigh public wants and needs, set priorities and approve budgets that achieve those priorities without over-stressing the taxpayers. The work is complex and requires data driven discussions and deliberations, along with a dose of respect and consideration for each other's points of view. My life experiences have taught me the value of working together and the importance of teamwork. Unfortunately, this was a rare occurrence on Town Council in the past few years.

Our Charter gives each Councilor one vote; no one is more powerful than another. It is important to elect people with diverse views, but also those who will work together, carefully consider, collaborate, and reach consensus on the important priorities and decisions. Consensus is key to inclusion in all its meanings; it is often defeated by arbitrary stances. The opposite of consensus is some form of behavior that results in distrust, cynicism, rancor, and abuse. I believe the absence of consensus and the inability to focus on teamwork has resulted in all of these things and more, likely visible to those who attended or followed our Council meetings on BATV, YouTube, or ZOOM.

Some of you may remember that I received the most votes in 2016 and instead of becoming the Mayor, I nominated Ms. DeBeatham Brown to be Mayor – a younger person, female, and Black. I thought she represented the future of the town and all I wanted was to work with her, using my prior planning and public administration experience for the benefit of our town. Unfortunately, that collaboration never occurred as her leadership style did not bend toward consensus or team building. I and others were frequently disrespected by the Mayor and her supporters, who chose authority (which she did not have) over deliberation and consensus, which resulted in many aggravating and non-productive situations.

I couldn't change the dynamic and did not want to spend another two years dealing with more of the same. So, after a few years of extreme frustration, I came to the difficult decision

that it is time to move on. I did not submit my name to the Democratic Town Committee (DTC) for re-nomination. The 65 member DTC apparently had their own reasons to not re-nominate the mayor and others; perhaps they were similar.

My 80th birthday is less than six months away and it's time to refocus my energies. I recall a tv show in the 1950's called "Life Begins at 80" and I'm ready to take on my new life challenge. However, I'm not going anywhere soon; I will be around, and will likely show up here and there to say this or that. I strongly believe in this town and its future and I'm still on board to help in whatever way I can.

Deputy Mayor Mann holds a Master in City Planning Degree from MIT and a Bachelor Degree in Political Science from Rutgers University. He has lived with his family in Bloomfield for 52 years and has been an active member on town committees and agencies for 35 of those years, beginning with: The Community Awareness Task Force (2 years); Inland Wetlands Commission (19 years); Conservation Energy Environment Committee (10 years); Town Council (4 years). He also coached little league baseball and travel team soccer. He was active in PTO and along with his wife Sharon created and managed Spirit Day at the High School in 1989 and 1990 and served on two updates of the Bloomfield Plan of Conservation and Development in 2002 and 2012 – one as a consultant. His professional experience included serving for 18 years for the city of Hartford as Deputy Director of Planning and Redevelopment and as Interim Model Cities Director.

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