

Municipal elections reiterate importance of transit, infrastructure issues

Angela Gismondi October 26, 2018



There were not a lot of surprises in Ontario's municipal election races on Oct. 22 but still construction stakeholders are indicating they are keen to use the opportunity of the new council mandates to reiterate key lobbying messages on infrastructure and transit.

“It's a change, and with change there is always a level of uncertainty. It will be interesting to see how the new governments across the province and in the GTHA approach the critical issues for voters such as the infrastructure and transit-related issues,” said **Nadia Todorova, director of government relations for the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario (RCCAO)**. “Infrastructure-related issues figured very prominently in the election and they were consistently listed as one of the top concerns for voters. I think that reflects the paramount need for municipal leaders to focus on infrastructure not only in terms of additional investments but also in terms of maintaining and optimizing the current infrastructure stock across the province.”

Todorova said the RCCAO will continue to focus on the need to build more resilient infrastructure faster.

“One of the issues that RCCAO has been very vocal about, and we think will make a massive positive impact in the province, is the building of the relief line, possibly going east from

downtown and north through the Danforth community,” she explained. “We’ve been very vocal on the fact that this will enable a growing number of commuters to take transit from the suburbs into the downtown area and avoiding that critical Yonge and Bloor station. That was an issue of importance before the election and going forward we believe very strongly that this should be the number one transit issue for the City of Toronto.”

In the City of Toronto, Mayor John Tory won his bid for re-election, easily beating out the city’s former chief planner Jennifer Keesmaat and 33 other candidates for his second consecutive term as mayor. Tory received 479,659 votes or about 63 per cent. Keesmaat received 178,193 votes, which amounted to 23.5 per cent.

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— **Michael de Lint**

Residential Construction Council of Ontario

“The people obviously like what he (Tory) has done and it would appear...he has a council that is generally supportive of his agenda and a council that he can move forward with,” said Ian Cunningham, president of the Council of Ontario Construction Associations.

Cunningham noted many of the incumbents across Ontario were re-elected.

“One storyline is the importance of incumbency in municipal elections. Where there are no political parties, no political party platforms, incumbency is a huge factor,” Cunningham said.

“In the City of Toronto there were a lot of what they were calling cage matches, where incumbents were matched against other incumbents as a result of the reduction in the number of wards.”

Giovanni Cautillo, executive director of the Greater Toronto Sewer and Watermain Contractors Association, said it is “business as usual.”

The association will continue working with the City of Toronto to address the infrastructure deficit and improve water, wastewater and stormwater in the city.

“What the municipal election does is change the way in which council operates,” said Cautillo in an email to the Daily Commercial News. “At times in the past, the council would overly debate and belabour an issue to exhaustion. The hope with a leaner council is that decisions are more expeditious and timely when matters are tabled for discussion and debate.”

Michael de Lint, director of building regulatory reform and technical standards for the Residential Construction Council of Ontario, said the council has and will continue to advocate for streamlining and speeding up the approvals process as even routine approvals are taking too long.

“I know John Tory supports the importance of streamlining the process,” said de Lint, adding the issue came up in a Toronto Region Board of Trade debate and Tory mentioned the approvals process as an issue he wants to deal with.

“He has acknowledged that Toronto’s approvals process is quite a bit slower. It takes almost twice as long to get approvals here in Toronto as it does in some other jurisdictions so that’s a huge problem. What slow approvals does is not only delays development but in some cases actually reduces supply. Some projects simply get dropped off the table.”

In July, the council released a report on the development approvals process in the province urging governments, regulators and developers to adopt reforms and generate ideas on how make the process more efficient.

“We plan to be meeting with municipal and provincial politicians and governments to talk about these ideas,” said de Lint.