
OPINION COLUMN

Shoemaker eagerness could be what the Sault needs

By SARA McCLEARY

Monday, November 27, 2017 10:09:36 EST PM

At the Nov. 20 City Council meeting, Ward 3 Coun. Matthew Shoemaker was the subject of some derision among his fellow councillors.

Because Shoemaker — our youngest and most eager member of council — has introduced 107 resolutions in his three years on council, some of his colleagues feel he is overdoing things. “I honestly feel that we’re really starting to stretch on what we should be spending our time on, and what we’re asking our staff to spend time on,” said Ward 2 Coun. Susan Myers.

Now, when it comes to this specific resolution and the way Shoemaker framed it, I can understand why the bill was ultimately voted down.

(It’s not the point I’m trying to make, but for those who missed it: the resolution asked for a staff report on turning off advanced turn signals on some traffic lights overnight. Shoemaker said it was needed because waiting when there is nobody turning is “annoying” and affects traffic flow. I’d say it’s probably not enough of an annoyance that it warrants the extra work for staff and council on that basis alone, but I would argue that the unnecessary burning of so much gas makes it worth a discussion.)

Whether or not council was right to vote down this specific resolution is not what I want to talk about. Rather, it’s an issue that came out of council’s discussion of Shoemaker’s motion.

That is, is it possible for a member of council to do too much? Is it a bad thing for a councillor to look at and think about “absolutely everything under the sun” as Myers said of Shoemaker, apparently mockingly?

My answer is no, it’s not possible for a member of city council to be too eager, and frankly it’s what this city needs.

You can be irritated with Shoemaker if you want. Maybe you do, in fact, think he’s annoyingly eager or overly ambitious. But you cannot — I repeat, you cannot — think that he doesn’t care about this city and its residents.

I haven't agreed with all of the resolutions Shoemaker has brought forward. For example, I adamantly opposed his 2015 idea that the free parking lots downtown should become paid. But I recognize that he wanted to look into it as a way to cut up to \$200,000 from the city's budget.

The point is, maybe not all of his proposals and resolutions are on point, maybe some are misguided, but he's out there trying to come up with solutions to get the city to where it needs to be. He has the energy and drive that council needs to bring the Sault into the future and to get it onto the map.

After all, we'll all be surprised if we end up making the shortlist for Amazon's HQ2, but the fact that the Sault even made a bid has garnered national attention, appearing on CBC and in the National Post, among other online news sites. That's getting our name out there to other businesses who might now consider making the Sault home. And that's thanks to the eager young councillor's efforts.

If nothing else, Shoemaker has made many people, myself included, realize that City Council needs more young blood if we are to get the Sault to where it needs to be to become truly competitive in an increasingly tough world. It's time for the older councillors, who think it's a bad thing to ask staff to look into a few dozen things that might improve the city, to step aside, and replace them with younger, more eager councillors who have the energy and drive to get out into the city and actively look for specific ways to improve it, to talk to residents about changes they want to see, and to promote the Sault on the national stage.

Sara McCleary is a regular contributor to Sault This Week's news columns.

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