

Collingwood Council Vacancy.

Personal Statement of Interest and Qualification.

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David C Conning, [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED].

I am a resident of Collingwood with a home at Sunset Point. I have been an owner of a heritage building in downtown Collingwood and my wife, Paula, operates our downtown business, Clarkson's Home Store, which we have owned and enjoyed for just over 12 years.

My interests in contributing to our Town include a volunteer position as a past board member and Chair of the Downtown BIA. For the last two years, I have been on the Executive Board of our OJHL Collingwood Blues hockey club and am proud to have contributed to the success the team has accomplished as National Champions in 2023/2024. Through our downtown store, we are the proud patron of the annual Murray J Clarkson Award which is awarded through the Blue Mountain Foundation for the Arts to up and coming local artists.

I have engaged from a public perspective and for the betterment of the Town in some important studies that have been conducted over the years such as the Waterfront Master Plan (2016), the Tourism Master Plans (2019 & 2024), the Economic Development Master Plan (2020) and the recent Downtown Master Plan (2024). One common thread that appears in most consultant's studies is the importance of "Art and Culture" in the future of Collingwood. With an education background in visual arts, I am an oil painter with paintings occasionally shown in Butter Gallery downtown and one painting was selected for our downtown "Art in the Street" initiative with it used to wrap the electrical box in front of TD Bank. I also had a live performance at the Simcoe Street theatre of a poetry book that I wrote which was presented by the BMFA and introduced by our Poet Laureate. I was accompanied by my daughter who has a Masters in Popular Music and Culture from Western University, and her husband who has a degree in Jazz Saxophone from Humber School of Music, as well as two other wonderful local musicians. I would read a poem and then the band would play a couple of songs. It was a fun night shifting back and forth between poetry and music. As an experienced person in the arts, I have agreed with all the studies which highlight the importance of Art & Culture in Collingwood.

I must say that it gives me great pride and reinforcement of this application to join Council that, without exception, I have received respect, strong approval and positive comments from leaders in the community, whether in business, government, arts, sports, or public interest groups with which I have selected to be involved. I have used my background and skills to boost the performance and achieve success through written material, imaging, and creative thought, all with the goal to maintain and improve our great Town.

Just this month, my wife, Paula, and I initiated a campaign of downtown local business owners to announce that, as a group of independent small retailers, the Collingwood Downtown merchants were hereby suspending all purchasing of goods from USA vendors as much as possible. We will work together to look for alternative suppliers rather than those in an adversarial economic country. We will be focussed on Canadian goods and services as well as our friendly countries in Europe and elsewhere. Paula and I walked the downtown streets to talk to business owners and then we held an after-hours meeting at Clarkson's where it was quickly confirmed that we are all of the same mindset and we will work as a group to deal with this difficult economic situation and promote our downtown business community as Proudly Canadian. Reaction from the community has been fast and positive. I will continue to work with our business community and the BIA on this directive.

My wife was a Public Health Nurse for 25 years, working with a regional Health Unit and groups such as Child & Family Services and initiating a resource centre for new mothers in conjunction with the Headwaters Health Care Centre. With her knowledge of the health industry, we have been following the progress of very important local initiatives such as the new hospital and the need to attract more doctors and nurse practitioners to our area.

Professionally, my career was focussed in the national sign industry, beginning in the design field and progressing from Art Director into senior management including the Marketing Services Manager in the Jim Pattison Sign Group. During this time, I was also tasked to join a focus group of the Federal Government studying the labour force challenges in the Canadian electrical sign industry.



In 2001, I founded my own company, Sign Management Canada Ltd. (SMC). During my career, my focus was retail identification throughout the country. I felt that there was a better way for national retailers to handle their signage. National companies traditionally would purchase their signs through a single source manufacturer, primarily to ensure that the corporate standards for their image were maintained. With my experience, I knew that there were very good local and regional manufacturers throughout Canada. By setting up an "SMC-approved" group of regional manufacturers and local installation and service companies, I could offer corporations a single source to maintain their standards (SMC) but rather than ship signs across Canada from a single manufacturer, I would have them made locally and manage the quality and ID regulations of the retailer's signage.

The company had a positive reaction very quickly with several companies. The first major retailer was CitiFinancial, a division of Citigroup out of Baltimore and SMC developed that relationship to the point that all primary signage in Canada was supplied and maintained by my company. Citigroup then expanded the SMC supplier role into the US. SMC clients were pleased with the management of their retail ID implementation and also the substantial shipping cost reduction resulting from our system.

Out of the blue, SMC received an endorsement by Ard Van Leeuwen, the Vice President & Federal Finance Critic for the Green Party of Canada, based on "supporting local manufacturing in the communities where the client will be doing business, reducing the shipment of goods and thereby reducing the carbon footprint of the programs it manages." I was very proud of the recognition of one of the basic foundations of my company.

A major step took place when Mercedes-Benz Canada Ltd. announced Sign Management Canada as its sole vendor for all primary dealership and facility electrical signage in Canada. Today, all illuminated signs on the buildings and the properties of Mercedes-Benz dealerships and offices in Canada have been supplied and managed by SMC.

I present this overview of the company that I founded because, through all of the projects in major cities and smaller towns in Canada, I have dealt with local municipalities and their bylaws. An important part of the SMC implementation process was to ensure that all signage for a facility meets the requirements, not only of the corporate standards, but also of the local community government. Therefore, I have had considerable experience on the other side of the table from Councils and municipal staff across the country dealing with issues such as development and variance applications. This has given me some insight into the role of municipal government in enforcing their local laws and maintaining community standards.

In 2022, I considered (at the request of some people whom I respect here in Town) running for Council. I responded to those individuals to express that I needed to make sure that I could offer the time necessary to do my best to understand the issues in front of Council that were to be discussed. Council issues are often complex and out of the scope of experience of the individuals reviewing them. Therefore, I felt that I could only commit to a seat in chambers if I was sure that I could do the homework for the issues at hand and speak to those who could provide insight so that I could add opinions and make decisions to the best of my ability.

At the time, I was in the process of the sale of Sign Management Canada Ltd., which took a great deal of my time. Since then, however, SMC has been purchased by a private equity company in Toronto and my available time has opened up. So, I believe that I am in a position to offer the time necessary to fulfill the duties of Councillor at a level that Council will deem proper.

With my background in business, the arts, retail, and local boards, I trust that you will see me as an interested and potentially useful voice in Council's important discussions. I will put my best efforts forward to gain the respect of Council, Staff, and the public as I have received from others in the community with whom I have collaborated in the interests of Collingwood.

Thank you for your consideration. Yours respectfully,



David Conning.