

Oneonta Mayor – DS Column – 10-01-2022

A recent letter writer was concerned that there is “an apparent divide between our City Council and our Mayor.”

I can allay those fears.

I’ve a long and well documented history as a team-builder. I will always seek to bridge a divide.

Currently I don’t see much of one.

As many will attest, my mantra is “respectful dialogue” – a phrase I repeat often enough to be meme-worthy.

Both the letter’s author and the newspaper itself, in its recent editorial, expressed reservations as to need and my intention in creating a committee to review the language of the City Charter.

I am grateful for this forum.

After these first nine-months as your Mayor, I hope it has become evident that I am fully committed to transparency, collaboration, and the engagement of those who haven’t previously had a voice.

In my prepared remarks to Council – (by the way, my remarks are always prepared) - the letter writer thought she detected an insinuation that the Council members are not individually and collectively partners in good governance. That is hardly the case. Each of our Council members has willfully taken on a 4-year long task of making Oneonta a better place. They attend hours of meetings, weigh, discuss and act upon matters of urgency to all, and they are just barely compensated.

I have nothing but respect for each of them. As the first Mayor in decades to arrive at the job having previously been a member of council, I have a unique view of the relationship.

I am committed to sharing information. (I keep a schedule of meetings with individual members, so that they can stay informed and offer their insight and perspective.)

And I treasure that perspective.

Creativity, open-mindedness, and an informed perspective. That is what I want, and it was what I sounded the call for at the Council Meeting.

I don’t know if there is anyone left in Oneonta that doesn’t know of my goal for the recruitment of 1,000 more new residents.

I am happy to report more good news...

There is consensus among leaders of business, education, and government that this *is* a goal to unite around. And I have had overwhelming support from the community.

How overwhelming? Over one hundred of your neighbors have stepped up and volunteered to share their experience, expertise, and passion to find solutions that have thus far eluded everyone else.

Turning the demographic tide.

That is the priority and enlisting you to join the effort has been the job I've given myself in this first year.

When a Council Member opined his disagreement with the legal opinion regarding the role of Council as reviewers and approvers of these volunteer opportunities, their creation, their membership, their location of meetings, and more, you might guess my surprise. I'd been clearly advised otherwise.

I'm not in agreement with the Council Member's reading of the Charter. None-the-less I am fully complying with the inferred goal to make super-transparent our conversation and strategizing. (I'm building a public-facing website.) This Council is totally in sync with my commitment to communication. There is no split.

Ad Hoc Committees: This is but one of many passages in the Charter that is ambiguous or contestable.

Seeing this, recognizing the Charter's tendency toward micro-management of City Administration, (and how that extended level of oversight has made Oneonta less nimble in its competition with other municipalities), I had to act.

That is why I have formed a Charter Review Panel. I swore an oath to protect the Charter, and I believe that includes ensuring its authority as a document that will help facilitate - and not complicate.

