

New Mayor Should Consult Election Rivals

As our new “right of center” mayor, Scott Gillingham, prepares to take office, there’s a very important reality that he may need to consider. Only 27% of Winnipeg voters cast their ballot for him, the smallest vote share for any mayor in recent history, while some 53% of voters chose more progressive center-left candidates.

In other words, it would seem that a majority of the 37% of Winnipeg’s population that did vote are not enthralled with the idea of four more years of new roads and higher taxes to pay for them, along with an escalating infrastructure debt and police helicopters.

In fact, based on the results, it would appear that a majority of the population does not want any of their additional property tax and frontage levee fees spent on new roads. Instead they seem to be much more interested in funding new, more innovative solutions to key issues such as poverty, homelessness, public safety and, dare I say it, the environment and climate change.

Given this reality, Mr. Gillingham would do well to consult with other key candidates for mayor, post-election, in order to build a solid city-wide consensus to address these issues. Shaun Loney, for example, has a proven track record in the alternative energy sector and creating innovative solutions to address both homelessness and crime. Add to that, Glen Murray, who has decades of experience in government, and is skilled, not only in the area of sustainability, but also building alliances and forming key financial partnerships with every level of government.

And building alliances will be essential to a successful tenure for Gillingham, especially given the damaging stand-off that existed between the city and provincial governments throughout much of Mayor Bowman’s tenure. During that period, Gillingham served for five-and-a-half years as Finance Committee Chair and led the budgeting process. A process which created a 4-year budget which has, thus far, left inner city neighbourhoods with unrepaired roads, fewer libraries, less recreational facilities, a decaying downtown and a dying tree canopy, while the construction of roads and overpasses into the suburbs continued unabated.

For many of us, this is not an auspicious record, and it is one that inner city neighbourhoods voted against. In fact of those who voted for Gillingham, a majority were not from Daniel Mac Fort Rouge or Mynarski but from the outlying suburbs.

Winnipeg 2022 general election

> Race for mayor

Vote share winner by poll

0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%

Glen Murray: 49,272

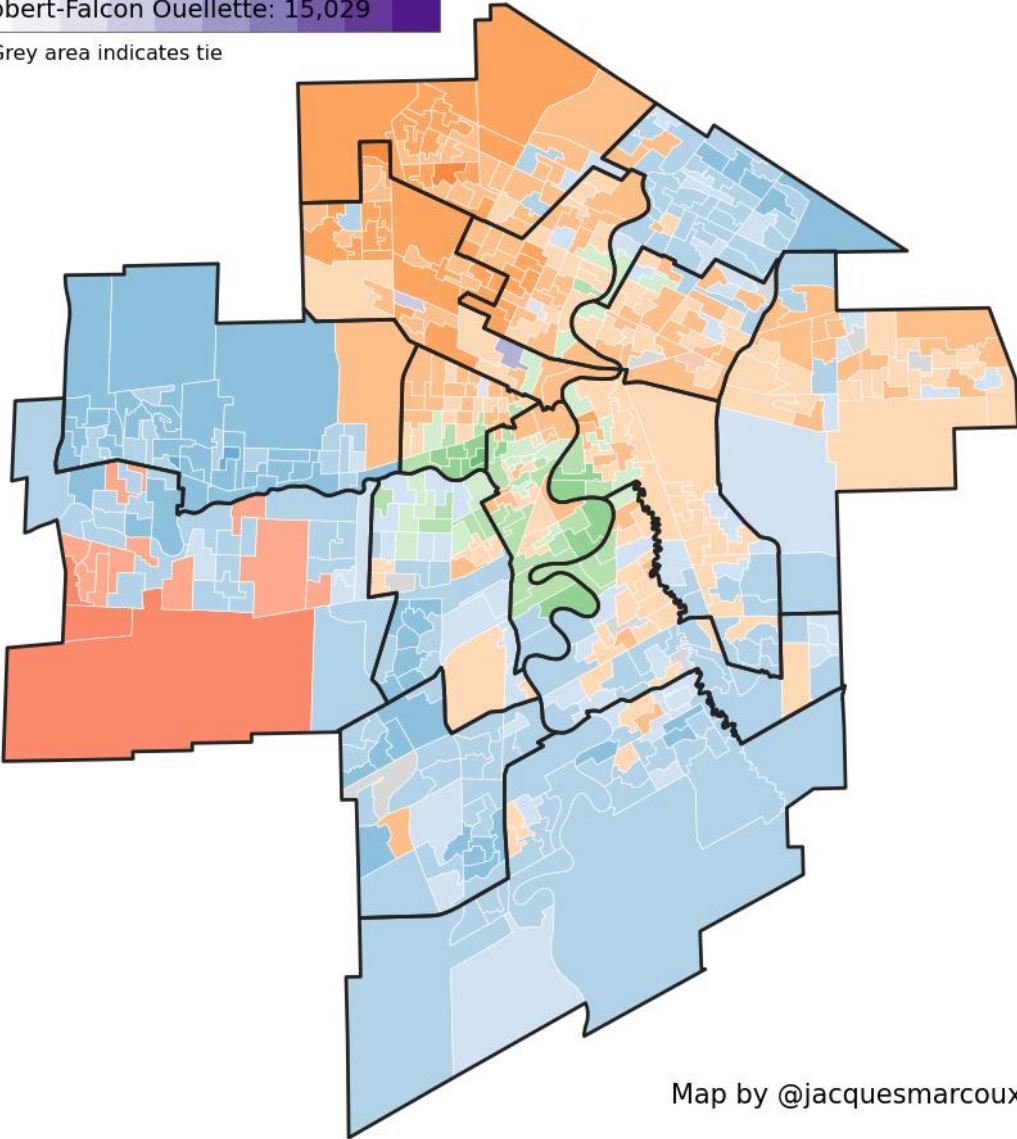
Scott Gillingham(✓): 53,663

Shaun Loney: 28,567

Kevin Klein: 28,806

Robert-Falcon Ouellette: 15,029

*Grey area indicates tie



Map by @jacquesmarcoux

The reasons behind the election results are visible on the streets and roads throughout the inner city and downtown neighbourhoods. Here in Wolseley, where I live, the homeless set up encampments in our parks, property crime is escalating, dozens of roads and back lanes are in disrepair and our mature canopy is dying at an alarming rate.

Those problems, here and elsewhere, will likely remain the same, unless our new mayor dramatically shifts his focus away from building or widening new roads - projects with a price tag of \$1 Billion - and focuses instead on a policy of what Shaun Loney called "fix it first."

So what does "fixing it first" really mean? It means not only repairing our existing streets and roads first, but also retrofitting them for active and public transportation systems that are low carbon and include trees.

It means a new approach to policing that funds and co-ordinates a practical collaboration between the police, social and community workers, focusing on offering care, job training and housing to those in desperate need, rather than displacing or incarcerating them. It means creating solutions for handling our sewage and run-off in a way that combines natural and grey infrastructure in new and innovative ways.

It also means an approach to city planning that stops repeating decades of past mistakes and focuses instead on learning from the past to ensure a fair and equitable future for the entire city.

And there are huge benefits if we do this. There are, for example, millions of infrastructure dollars the city can access from the Federal Government to fund everything from active transportation and building retrofits to electric vehicles and hybrid infrastructure.

But most importantly, projects like these will also make for a more just, climate resilient city. And when we all stop and set aside our own petty concerns, isn't that exactly what most of us really want – a safer, more just, more climate resilient city?

So perhaps that is what our new mayor should be aspiring to create, with the help of every expert he has at his disposal, regardless of their political stripes. Being the somewhat exhausted optimist I am, I believe Mayor Gillingham has a chance to do just that. Only time will tell if he has the courage and the wisdom to do it.

