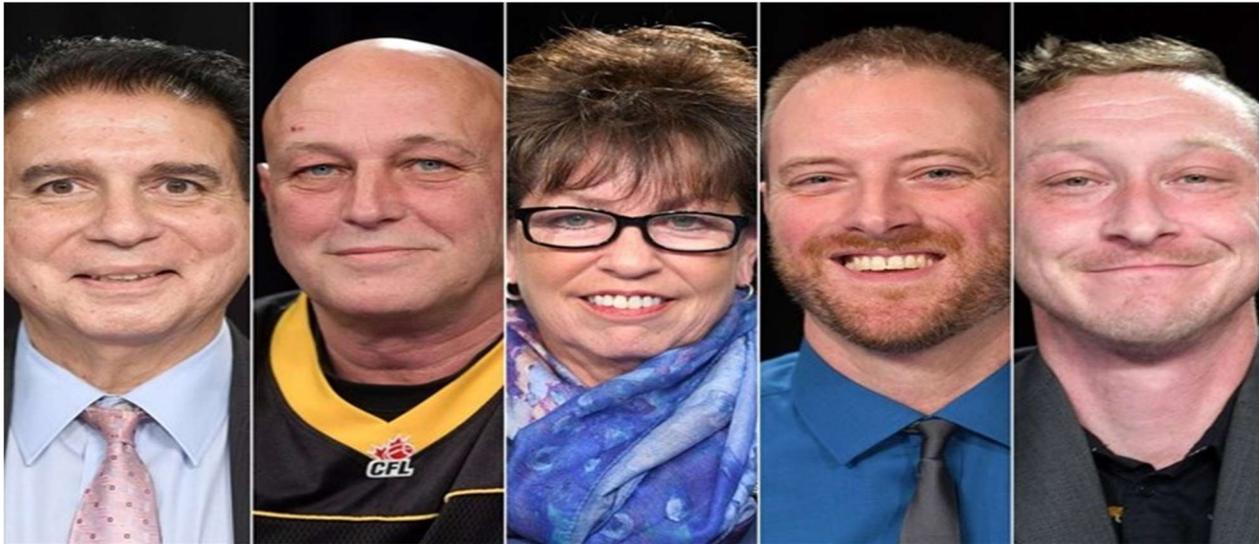


‘We need change’: Ward 6 challengers push to unseat Hamilton’s longest-serving councillor

Incumbent Tom Jackson defended himself against debate accusations that the past council kept the public in the dark about parkway and sewage spill scandals.

News 04:00 PM by Matthew Van Dongen Hamilton Spectator Sept 21, 2022

City hall scandals and secrecy show council is ready for a change of leadership, say Ward 6 candidates



trying to unseat Hamilton’s longest-serving councillor.

During a Cable 14 debate co-hosted by The Hamilton Spectator, candidates for the east Mountain ward argued the last council — including incumbent Tom Jackson — more than once “suppressed” important public information.

Would-be councillors pointed to a buried safety report about the Red Hill Valley Parkway — which spurred a judicial inquiry — and council’s decision to keep secret details of a 24-billion-litre sewage leak until The Spec spilled the beans.

Jackson, who has served as an east Mountain alderman and councillor since 1988, was asked by The Spectator if in hindsight he would have dealt with the so-called Sewergate spill secrecy differently.

Jackson replied he and other council members — who later apologized to the public — relied on “flawed” legal advice in an effort to protect the city from liability issues. He emphasized he has since supported cleanup efforts and improved inspections to prevent future spills. “Lessons have been learned,” he said.

His skeptical competitors, however, argued the past council hid public information far too often.

“I have a hard time believing that, for the majority of councillors, it wasn’t about protecting themselves,” said small business owner Chris Slye, who added council in general keeps too much information behind closed doors.

Ward 6 candidates Tom Jackson, Dan Preston, Donna Puddu, Chris Slye and Stefan Spolnik. - Cathie Coward

Paramedic Stefan Spolnik argued council “suppressed” information about both the Sewergate and Red Hill scandals. “You have to do what’s right rather than what will protect you legally.”

Donna Puddu, who said her son unknowingly endangered himself during the four-year sewage spill while volunteering in creek cleanups, argued council also ignored warnings from concerned residents before the spill was discovered.

“It’s a problem when it’s covered up, but also a problem when you ignore the community concerns,” said the federal constituency office manager.