

Roe aims to keep new council on forward path<!--s:58-->

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Content

Eight months ago, Marc Roe would've thought someone was insane if, by the start of 2022, he would be the most senior member on the Ottumwa City Council.

Yet, here he is.

"Seven or eight months ago, I would have said, 'No, that's not right. Bob Meyers is going to be that guy,'" Roe said. "His retirement was a shock to everybody. It was a quick pill to try to absorb."

Through resignations, appointments and an election, Roe emerged from the fall shakeup as the council's elder statesman after just six years. It's quite a new role in many ways, but one he is ready for. Just as he was guided by his more experienced predecessors to the best of their ability when he was new, Roe will do the same with the new group, starting with the first meeting of the new year Tuesday at City Hall.

Meyers's retirement, which was effective New Year's Eve, was the last domino to tumble during a topsy-turvy election cycle, when nine different people either held a seat, were appointed or elected and sworn in to four council seats:

- Skip Stevens resigned from his seat in August for health reasons. Rick Johnson was appointed the seat in September until the November city-school election.
- Council members Matt Dalbey and Holly Berg decided not to seek re-election, guaranteeing a majority of the five-member council would change hands.
- Mayor Tom Lazio announced his retirement in August, effective at the end of his term, creating three open city council seats and a mayor's seat on the ballot.
- Sandra Pope, Cara Galloway and Doug McAntire were elected to the council; Pope, the first person of color to be elected to the council, was the highest vote-getter and was seated early to take the Stevens/Johnson seat, and then will start her full term beginning Tuesday. Johnson was elected mayor to succeed Lazio.
- A week after the election, Meyers informed the city he would leave at the end of the year, with two years left on his current term. The council proceeded to appoint the fourth-place finisher in the election, Russ Hull, to fill Meyers's vacancy until the next city election.

When he was first elected in 2015, Roe said the council was experienced in many areas of city business, and he could approach several colleagues with questions. He figures that will be part of his role now, with three of the new council members having no experience in public office.

However, he also believes there are other tools at the council members' disposal.

"I think back to when I first took office, I think there's a certain leadership component to it, and there will be a reasonable expectation for me to do that when possible," Roe said. "I leaned heavily on council members Meyers, Dalbey and Stevens.

"But I think one additional component that we have now is a very, very sound city staff," he said. "They are extremely knowledgeable, and I know our newly elected officials are going to them on a very regular basis right now to gather information. That's a plus. So while there might be some leadership I will be conducting, I do believe we have the staff in place that will bear the burden of that as well."

Regardless of the experience level of the new members, Roe believes the voters chose wisely in November. He is pleased that voters elected a council and mayor that reflected who they are, what they look like and what they represent.

"We have arguably the most diverse city council in respect to gender, race and age that I can think of in my lifetime," he said, noting two candidates — Hull and Galloway — who are 40 or under. "Number one, that's needed. I'm really proud of the way the community voted this time. This is the closest we've ever been to mirroring what the community looks like, and man, that's just awesome in my opinion."

Furthermore, in personal interactions with the newly elected leaders, Roe has seen a general willingness to make the community better.

"I think that all of them are hungry to make some changes and keep the town going in the right direction," he said. "One thing that's always frightened me is someone running on a single issue. In this case, we've gotten really lucky because I don't know there's a candidate that ran on any one particular issue other than the greater good of the community.

"The citizens of Ottumwa made good decisions in electing these people."

However, Roe acknowledges there will be ups and downs, and basically no adjustment period when it comes to votes. The adage that no one will be happy 100% of the time certainly applies.

However, he said a few things stood out as far as what the new members should keep in mind.

"You have to be willing to change your mind," Roe said. "I'm also a big believer that you can't make effective decisions unless you know what the flavor of the community is and what things are going on. You have to be involved, volunteer, serve on other boards.

"Just from a political standpoint, make sure your skin is thick," he said. "You're going to be disliked by a lot of people a lot of the time, and that's going to be a very fluid list of people. One decision one week may be hated by half the community, the next decision the next week you might be hated by the other half."

Yet, Roe has hope for the newcomers joining him on the bench. Except for Pope, who has sat on the council for a handful of meetings, every other member is green in their new role, from the mayor to the other council members.

"We always get caught up in people saying, 'We need more diverse boards and we need to get people involved,'" he said. "But it's hard to find people that have the actual time and energy to get involved. So when we do find those few people that have that time and energy, that's almost something magical to have happen.

"It's fantastic we have some younger folks now because, let's face it, they're going to be living here for the next 40 years and having their children involved in the community," Roe said. "So they have a very

vested interest in making sure things are done right and that they're thinking through on decisions and growing the community."

Tagline

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11-16 Ottumwa City Council meeting



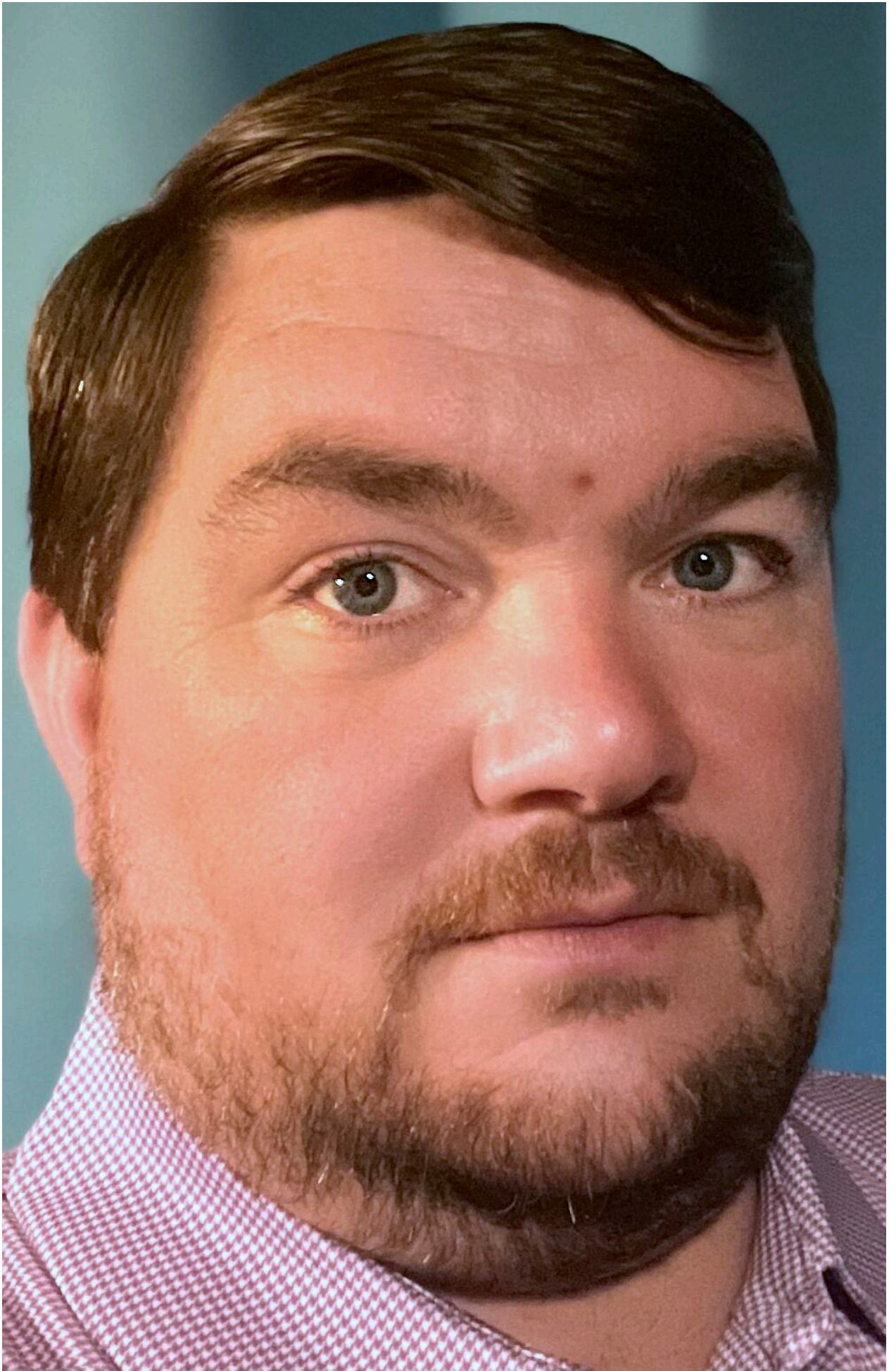
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