

Mike Bradley will win again

Dan McCaffery - July 2026

Should he seek another term this fall, history suggests Mayor-for-Life Mike Bradley will win yet again.

That's not because of his record. It's simply because incumbents have an overwhelming advantage over challengers.

Statistics tell the tale. Our first mayoral race took place in 1857, some 169 years ago. Since that vote, which was held a decade before Canada came into existence, a scant five of Sarnia's 66 mayors have received the Royal Order of the Boot.

In reality, only 7.5 per cent of incumbents have been kicked to the curb. In theory, they can be expected to bite the dust an average of just three times a century. In practise, going up against one of them is almost a suicide mission.

Even two former mayors – Joe Lowrie and Fred Watson – were shellacked when, years after leaving office, they tried to win their jobs back without the power of incumbency behind them.

Of course not all the 61 undefeated mayors were continuously re-elected. Four died in office and many others chose not to run again, retiring with their winning streaks intact. Still, there's no denying incumbents enjoy a huge edge.

The first mayor to walk the plank was Joshua Adams, whose 1862 bid for a second term was derailed by a scandal. Specifically, he was axed after ignoring council's orders about who to appoint to a board charged with upgrading Sarnia's streets. Instead, he chose his own people, which led to accusations he was trying to fix some roads in order to benefit rich friends.

The next head of council to be deep-sixed was Arthur Poussette, who lost the 1887 election by 82 votes. What sent him to Davy Jones's locker was a contentious bylaw banning cattle from streets. There were 144 cows in the municipality and their owners were not happy with the new restriction.

William Proctor went down in flames in 1917. Proctor wasn't your typical politician. He refused to campaign, giving no speeches, distributing no pamphlets or doing anything else to garner votes. What's surprising isn't that he was tossed out, but that he ever managed to capture the mayor's chair in the first place.

Next to meet his Waterloo was football hero Norm Perry. The legendary Galloping Ghost, who led the Sarnia Imperials to the 1934 Grey Cup before becoming mayor, wanted to build a recreation centre/arena complex. But voters were not happy with the proposed \$75,000 price tag. They rejected the project in a referendum, then sent Perry packing in 1940.

The most recent mayor to be given the heave-ho was Paul Blundy, who was checkmated more than half a century ago.

Blundy had been a reasonably good leader who ruled for eight years. But in 1974 he ran up against a much younger, more dynamic opponent named Andy Brandt.

All of this isn't to say new candidates shouldn't come forward. Mayors should be forced to defend their records in a campaign. But challengers should know that, throughout our long history, the number of incumbents to be unceremoniously drummed out of office can be counted on one hand.