

LOWE: Mayor not enthusiastic about wearing city bling

LEZLIE LOWE

Published February 11, 2016 - 8:29pm

Last Updated February 11, 2016 - 9:04pm



Mayor Mike Savage waves to a crowd following the presentation of the chain of office by former mayor Peter Kelly.

The chain of office is an oversized bling of thing, a giant gold-plated necklace symbolizing the power of the mayor.

Mike Savage did not wear his to the Big C Mayors' Caucus meetings last week in Ottawa. And not just because no one else the room brought theirs.

"Picks the hell out of a suit, I'll tell ya."

The ornate, naval-grazing chain was made in 1901 and befits the office in every sense but one: nobody should have to suffer through wearing it.

Savage dropped it over my head for a test drive this week. Its pinpoint hooks caught my sweater. I cringed. He adjusted it.

"There, is that better?"

"Much better, thank you," I lied.

We sat in armchairs and chatted while I wore it, feeling no more great and powerful than before. (Perhaps because I have no actual power.) The next morning, I found two small gashes it dug into my left shoulder.

This is not a nice piece of jewellery.

Ignominious history, too.

The mayor of the day — James Hamilton — ordered it without authorization, then expected the city to pick up the tab for the chain, and an accompanying robe — together about 100 pounds sterling. In today's currency, about \$22,000. (No wonder it's kept locked up.) Council approved the expense retroactively. Tsk-ts

Maybe they could have returned it, though Mappin Brothers of London transposed the numbers on one side, listing Halifax's founding year as 1479. An archival photo from the early 1950s shows a jaunty fez completing the outfit. I asked around — no one's seen the fez. The robe is lost.

-NFE-632-V

office he prefers. More Kim than Kanye. And I read that sometimes the mayor's spouse may have a miniature replica of the big chain to signify mayoral association, but there's no record of a second being made. Anyway, Savage says, "The mayor's spouse today wouldn't be caught dead wearing one."

The vibe's clear: Savage doesn't love this fancy necklace. But maybe he just isn't one for pomp. When he was elected, he asked councillors not to call him "Your Worship." He let me fling my coat on a chair with a plaque that says: This chair was used by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, June 2010.

"It's a little anachronistic," he says of the chain. "It's meant to elevate the wearer because of the office she or he holds, as opposed to anything they've done to earn it. I think that's a little bit out of whack with how we see elected office."

Speaking of anachronism, Savage had the Bedford and Dartmouth chains brought up from the vault. They feel special, delivered in cases and strapped to velvet backings. Bedford's diminutive chain is silver with anchors, ship wheels and scallop shells. Dartmouth's isn't quite as big as Halifax's, but features a comely beaver and the names and dates of former mayors, including, of course, Savage's father, John Savage. Gloria McCluskey is missing an end date: "1992 - ." Read into that whatever you like.

Savage most recently wore the chain on Feb. 3, at the swearing-in of councillor Tony Mancini. He wore it at his own swearing-in, too. "They told me I had to." He dons it for the odd ceremony and the duration of the New Year's levee. (Luckily, there are mimosas.)

"People like to see it," he says, "so I feel like I should wear it more often."

I don't see that happening.

"You can take it with you," he says as I pack up. "We just need it back by Christmas."