

Decore

Mayoralty In

The ten hour clock said quarter past two when Laurence Decore and his faithful sidekick Sterling Sunley entered the Gateway office. "Do you want to do the interview here?" said Sunley. "We'll use Brent's office," I said. Little did I realize that this was the last time I would see the ten hour clock. The phone rang. It was someone wanting to place an ad. "In here Mr. Decore," I said gesturing to Brent's office. "It's cold in here," he said. "Yes," I said. It was time to begin the interview.

Gateway: In your campaigns, both you and Mayor Purves have stressed leadership. How exactly do you intend to get council operating more efficiently?

Decore: I think that one of the difficulties that has existed in the past is that the mayor has too closely aligned himself with one of the groups and that's a sure formula for difficulty. You have got to seek out advice and input from all of the personalities and all of the philosophies. I think that in talking about leadership, Edmontonians almost universally say that Council is a circus. It's not a put-down on the people involved. I think it's a put-down on the mechanics, the type of government we have. We operate under a commission board system of government which I think is antiquated. That system is predicated on the belief that aldermen are part-time politicians. Three or four decades ago that was right, aldermen came to a meeting every two months, formulated a little policy and the commissioners carried it out. But all of that has changed; people demand quick decisions. Aldermen are becoming more and more full time politicians.

Gateway: Do you think aldermen should be paid as full-time politicians?

Decore: They're getting paid a pretty good wage — about \$26,000 — now. Yes, I'm saying that what is needed is a fundamental change in the mechanics of government, and that is the establishment of an executive committee. An executive committee would streamline government and emphasize the role of the elected official. That's the kind of leadership I'm talking about, the recognition that something is wrong and something must be done to improve the situation. I think an Executive Committee does that, it streamlines government, emphasizes the role of the elected representative and downplays the role of the bureaucrat.

Gateway: How would this Executive Committee operate?

Decore: They (the committee) would be delegated the authority that is with council as a whole. With these six aldermen (on the committee) meeting with the mayor daily (council meets every two weeks) to deal with problems, issues will get resolved more quickly, people will be happier, and it will be cheaper for the taxpayer.

Gateway: University students have been particularly hard-hit by transit cutbacks. Would you consider restoring some of the routes that have been eliminated?

Decore: Yes, I think that the budgetary mauling that was done on transit was badly done — it was overdone. It's done by a couple of managers at the top have to be corrected. I think the way to do this is with some sort of a hearing mechanism where people are allowed to come forward and say we have a senior citizen's home here with 100 or 200 people that has been devastated by the moving of the bus stop, or we have no bus ... all of those things have to be listened to.

Gateway: Is a ride on ETS worth 85¢?

Decore: We're not out of line with other cities in North America.

Gateway: Improving the transit system will cost money. Won't this worsen the civic deficit which you are already so concerned about?

Decore: A good transit system, a good police system and a good fire protection system are services that we can't fudge on or skimp on or cheat on — those have to be top notch. If we have to give way somewhere else we still give way somewhere else.

Gateway: Where would that somewhere else be?

Decore: The goal of the politician has to be to insure that wages are not increased. I've gone to labour union leaders and I think it can be done, rather than working through a process of confrontation. I also think our government got too big. We have some 26 departments of the city government — almost as many as the provincial government.

We could easily consolidate those departments and compress management to save money ... I think you can compress at the top. I've already talked about eliminating the commission board. It costs us at least two million dollars a year.

Gateway: At their last meeting, Council approved Phase Three of West Edmonton Mall. Do you think this was a wise move?

Decore: I think they should have waited. I suggested waiting a 90 day period to allow the residents who were coming out vociferously against the development and transportation planners to be heard from.

Gateway: What about Triple Five's plans for the Eaton Centre?

Decore: I suggested that if Council gave concessions for West Edmonton Mall Phase Three that they link it to a guarantee that the developer build those facilities in the downtown core.

Gateway: Will West Edmonton Mall draw business away from downtown?

Decore: I think the downtown is a very serious problem. Pink bricks and flower pots and trees are good but they are not going to solve the problem. Unless there are people living in the downtown to create the desire for bistros and restaurants there won't be a revitalized downtown. We can revitalize by relaxing a very restrictive city core bylaw and getting some residential accommodation, and using some imagination in using the 82 acre parcel of land the CNR owns. It's the eyesore of the city.

Gateway: What do you think should be done with LRT?

Decore: I'm a very strong proponent of LRT. It has to get to the University as quickly as possible. The next phase is to take it down 114 st. to Millwoods or out to the West End. My preference is to take it down 114 st. But that means the province has to be lobbied very, very, ferociously. Frankly, I don't understand the reluctance on the part of the province to get involved in providing funding. It is certainly a project that would meet the requirement for spending money under the Alberta Heritage Act. It is a project for future generations of Albertans.

Gateway: So you think the province should pay for LRT?

Decore: It can't be done any other way. I don't think that enough work has been done with the local MLA's.

Gateway: The City has traditionally been a major source of summer employment for students, but last year Parks and Recreation actually cut back on the number of people it hired and you are advocating a hiring freeze.

Decore: Well the city is agonizing to find the money to provide the necessary police, fire and transit services, and people are demanding that there be no increase in taxes. It is going to be very difficult to find jobs and I can't promise anything.

Gateway: What are your plans for the river valley?

Decore: The position of the mayor is that he wants to build the McKinnon Freeway which will eat up more acres than the acreage that I think should be preserved by the existing river valley communities. The less than one per-cent of the river valley that is now in the form of existing communities should be left. There should be a very gentle kind of development that melds very gently greenspace, water and residential accommodation. That residential accommodation should in no way exceed two stories. It should be modelled something along the lines of False Creek in Vancouver without the commercial development. Stimulating the downtown core is a result of that kind of development.

Gateway: Do you think the personal animosity between yourself and Mayor Purves is detracting from the campaign?

Decore: There's no mudslinging coming from me. I'm saying that I want to debate the issues. I'm not going to debate silly things like economic conservatism and social liberalism which he (Purves) is raising at every meeting. I want to debate the issues of the city. Partisan party politics have nothing to do with municipal government.

Last Thursday the Gateway interviewed Laurence Decore and Mayor Purves, the two front runners in the mayoralty race. Here are their views on everything from the river valley to the city's future.



Interview with Laurence Decore by Mark Roppel