

Watson says 'good relationship' with Trudeau will help Ottawa



[Matthew Pearson, Ottawa Citizen](#)

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Mayor Jim Watson boasted Tuesday that his “good relationship” with prime minister-elect Justin Trudeau will benefit Ottawa residents, many of whom elected Liberal MPs on Monday night as part of the party’s sweep across the National Capital Region.

But Watson seemed less sure about a newly elected Liberal MP’s pledge to move a federal department — and all the jobs that come with it — to Orléans.

Andrew Leslie, a former Canadian Forces lieutenant-general who’s been serving as a senior adviser to Trudeau, handily wrested the east-end riding from the nine-year grip of Conservative incumbent Royal Galipeau.

He says he’d like to see a federal department move its headquarters to the city’s east end in order to make Orléans a destination and encourage other employers to set up shop there.

“There’s a variety of details to sort out, but I would argue the job of a leader is to state an aspirational vision and then work hard to build the consensus amongst the very levels of government and the bigger team to get it done, and that’s what we’re going to do,” Leslie said Tuesday on CBC’s Ottawa Morning.

Watson appeared open to the idea, but said the city’s current infrastructure couldn’t support a large-scale shift of federal employees to the east-end until there is light rail transit service to Orléans. And that’s not expected to be done until 2023, at the earliest.

“Right now, I think the 174 is a challenge,” Watson said. “Once we get LRT to Orléans, that makes it a lot more logistically possible to move jobs from one part of the city to the other.”

The mayor told reporters his relationship with the outgoing Conservative government was a challenge, noting the federal government was always the last to come to the table with funding and only then “after a lot of pushing.”

The Conservatives, for example, did eventually commit up to \$1 billion toward the second phase of the city’s LRT plan, but in July, months after the province stepped up to the plate with a similar promise.

“You need a relationship that is much more constructive and cooperative and has a greater level of communications than what we’ve seen with the outgoing government,” Watson said.

“The last thing people like seeing are squabbles between three orders of government, and I think you’ll see a much more concerted effort to get along and work well with the city, with local community groups and with the provincial government.”

The mayor said Trudeau called him at home the night before the party unveiled its infrastructure plan during the campaign and is on the same page as the city when it comes to reforming the National Capital Commission and scrounging up more affordable housing dollars.

As for the controversial location proposed for the Monument to the Victims of Communism — which newly elected Ottawa Centre MP Catherine McKenna spoke out against — Watson said he hopes the new government will step in and put a hold on the process until “proper” public consultation about the monument’s location has been undertaken.

“That’s something that could be done relatively quickly that would not require legislation or regulation change or even budget decision,” Watson said.

A former provincial Liberal cabinet minister, the mayor admitted it is often easier to work with Liberals at other levels of government.

“To have a premier that I can pick up and the phone and speak with and a prime minister who I have a good relationship with will help the City of Ottawa,” he said.

Watson wouldn’t wager a guess on who the new senior minister for the federal region will be.

“I wish whoever it is the very best and I look forward to working with him or her,” Watson said.

Veteran Liberal MPs Mauril Bélanger and David McGuinty must certainly be front-runners given each man’s breadth of experience in Ottawa.