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# Rick Becksted exit interview: What he says about two years as mayor and will he run again?

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PORTSMOUTH – One of the things outgoing Mayor Rick Becksted enjoyed most during his one term as mayor was getting to speak to two Portsmouth High School graduating classes.

“How many people get to go and speak as the mayor of the town in which you graduated high school from,” Becksted asked rhetorically during a recent interview in the mayor’s office at City Hall. “That was a really big thing for me to be able to actually go and speak to these graduates. To be able to share the story that I was not the perfect student shows if I can do this, what can they achieve with a little bit of work.”

Becksted’s term will end Jan. 1 after he and several other incumbent city councilors – known as the Becksted 5 because they often voted the say way on issues – were voted out of office during the city’s November municipal elections.

**What's next for the skatepark:** 'This is the time': Portsmouth approves $2.2 million skatepark at 'stump dump'

Despite the loss, Becksted said he remains proud of helping to steer the city through the COVID-19 pandemic.

“I’m proud of where we are right now, I think we’re in a good place regardless of having to deal with the new variant,” he said. “We managed to make it through a pandemic.”

He also pointed to his work with a group of city mayors in the state, which through lobbying the Legislature led to an adjustment in the state formula to return monies from the state Rooms and Meals Tax back to communities.

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That change led to more money coming back to Portsmouth and other communities this year, and a lower than anticipated tax rate.

City Manager Karen Conard announced in November that the tax rate was lower than anticipated “due to an increase in revenues coming to the City from the State, particularly the Rooms & Meals tax.”

“All the mayors got a special award for working on that from the New Hampshire Municipal Association,” Becksted said. “I think that was a really big thing for us.”

Becksted addressed a wide range of issues during the interview, including:

## Working with Mayor-elect Deaglan McEachern

His relationship with Mayor-elect Deaglan McEachern. Becksted said the two “really got to know each other over the last two years, we really didn’t know anything about each other before than.”

“I look up to Deaglan, literally,” he said with a laugh and described the mayor-elect as “family orientated” and added that, “I think he has a piece of what Portsmouth really saw in me, for them to really be heard and listened to.”

**More:** 'Far greater public use': Binnie files to become Portsmouth's new McIntyre partner

## What's next for Portsmouth

•, McEachern and the incoming council’s biggest challenge. “It’s not having any history of the government, I think that’s a really big thing, we’ve got new people, and following a meeting here and there isn’t really getting that history.”

“It’s going to be a big challenge for him,” Becksted added.

Only three of the incoming council members have served on the council before: McEachern, John Tabor and Josh Denton.

## What's next for the Thomas J. McIntyre Federal Building

Bill Binnie’s interest in becoming the city’s new development partner on the initiative to redevelop the Thomas J. McIntyre Federal Building.

The city is currently involved in a lawsuit with its estranged partners Redgate/Kane and Binnie filed a letter of intent with the city to work on the project.

“I hope they entertain, at least listening to what Mr. Binnie has to offer the city,” Becksted said. “We’ve only listened to one side with Redgate/Kane and there’s been hesitation and a little pushback.”

“Maybe Mr. Binnie won’t have that same type of approach,” Becksted added.

## Video targeting 'Becksted 5'

The response from the community condemning an anonymous attack video created and aimed at the Becksted 5.

“Ultimately it’s not about us, it’s about our city. For those type of tactics to come into play that no one has ever seen here before, it’s not right,” he said. “It’s something that everyone should avoid at all costs and we should condemn it.

**Reacting to video:** 'Totally disgusting': Portsmouth councilors react to political video attacking 'Becksted 5'

## Development and trying to create more affordable housing

“It’s going to take good planning to be able to get it done and a more diverse mix of housing,” Becksted said. “The work-force thing does not seem to be working the way it was intended or meant to be, just the same way the ADUs (Accessory Dwelling Units) aren’t,” he said. “Yeah it will create housing but it’s expensive housing. We’re getting these tiny little apartments and you’re still having to pay two to three thousand dollars a month for them, it just doesn’t make any sense.”

## Parking in Portsmouth

Becksted predicted that within two years “there will come a day of reckoning when we’re going to realize we’re going to need a third garage because there isn’t enough parking.”

“We passed the buck on with these variances, just because someone builds something doesn’t’ necessarily give them the right” to not meet city parking requirements,” he said.

Becksted believes the city’s second municipal garage, The Foundry Place garage, will start filling regularly with the renovation work being doing at the High/Hanover garage and with Novocure opening its headquarters at 64 Vaughan Mall.

**Where to park (or not) and when:** Street closures and parking limits for Portsmouth holiday events

Plus, he noted, the plan was when Foundry was opened for Deer Street Associates to build four developments around the garage.

That hasn’t happened yet but DSA has been selling its projects and he believes they will move forward at some point.

“If we’ve already basically filled it and we haven’t put a building around it, what do you think is going to happen when they do, it’s going to explode,” he said about parking demand downtown and in the North End.

## Will Rick Becksted run again for City Council

Becksted said he hasn’t decided yet for sure, but acknowledged “if a time or place comes in 18 months….and I had enough support, I would step back into that role again.”