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We're back in business, says Aurora Chamber of Commerce

By Brock Weir

How can the Aurora Chamber of Commerce find its relevancy within the community again as business needs evolve?

That is the question the Chamber hopes to answer next week as they roll out a new two-year strategic plan, which is billed under the banner of ?Getting Back to Business.?

According to Javed Khan, Chair of the Aurora Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors, the plan, which will be unveiled at a special meeting open to the public next Thursday, is the result of a wholesale examination of where the Chamber is today, where it is going, and how it can provide ?value? not just to Chamber members, but the community as a whole.

?We're revisiting everything: we're revisiting how we engage with our business community, we're revisiting how we represent the business community, we're revisiting how we have perhaps not had a strong focus, which we should have, with the folks at the Town,? says Mr. Khan. ?That is a very strong relationship and we need to fill that gap in. That is what ?Back to Business' means.?

When Mr. Khan was appointed to lead the Board in November, he told members the Chamber was now at a significant crossroads, citing diminishing revenue and other challenges, and their feedback would be essential in guiding the path forward. Since that time, ?refreshment? is one piece of feedback he says has been very consistent, and there have been a number of conversations on where this path has gone off-course in recent years.

But, what happened in the past, is firmly in the past, he says without further elaboration.

?We are just working with a brand new canvas and just finding ways to bring our Chamber back to the level it was back over the years,? he says. ?I preface that with the Chamber network in general is having challenges. Any Chamber you can think of in various communities are having challenges just trying to continue to be relevant and that is the number one thing I say to everybody: how can we be relevant to our community?

?When I met with the Mayor, the what do we do as partners with the Town to really be part of the conversation within our business community? At the end of the day, we just represent the business community. That is our thing. We're not an event management company, we don't put on social events, we're representing the business community and therefore we really want to get to that point where that the conversation around Town Hall is if anything that comes up in meetings about business, we don't want to read about it in The Auroran; we want to be part of the conversation.?

As far as conversations go, however, the louder the better.

Mr. Khan says the plan looks at ways to significantly ramp up the level of participation from members of the local business community with a change of focus. Part of the conversation within the Chamber has been increasing the involvement of younger entrepreneurs from the Aurora area. While Mr. Khan says he doesn't think there is a need to create a young professional network such as the one thriving in Newmarket, there are opportunities for partnership and collaboration.

?I have had conversations with staff recommending they start reaching out to schools,? say Mr. Khan, citing a recent article in The Auroran about the Classy Cyborgs, a robotics team stemming from Lester B. Pearson Public School, that has recently incorporated as a business to drive forward their tools to help the visually impaired learn braille. ?Let's start to get some of these young entrepreneurs or high school students involved in the Chamber. That is a perfect example: a great Aurora business story and we should be celebrating that as part of our Chamber.?

The Aurora Chamber of Commerce's Back to Business meeting is scheduled to get underway on Thursday, January 28, at 9 a.m., running through 11 a.m. To register, call 905-727-7262 or visit aurorachamber.on.ca/events.

?This is a pivotal point for our Chamber,? says Mr. Khan. ?We really want everyone in the business community and the community at large to participate. I would like them to come and understand where the Chamber is going within our community and, if they have an opportunity and time, to volunteer and participate. We would really appreciate that and love to even have high school kids. This is a time where, once we get this out of the way, it is full steam ahead.?