

VOTE 2014: Recreation and traffic top candidate Mark Etwell's priority list



By Brock Weir

Aurora resident Mark Etwell has always had an interest in getting involved in the civic process, but with two young kids there often wasn't enough time to give a leap into the political ring much consideration ? but when things hit close to home, it is time for some re-evaluation.

As a resident on Conover Avenue, one issue that hit particularly close to home was the future of open space on Mavrinac Boulevard residents are pushing to preserve as open green space and parkland. Council ultimately decided to take landowners to court earlier this year to secure their first right of refusal to purchase the land under terms originally set out in the last decade, but in Mr. Etwell's view, Council dropped the ball.

?The way they handled it wasn't ideal,? says Mr. Etwell of Council. ?They weren't really aware this was going on and they weren't really paying attention to things. Now there is a legal battle which has additional costs to it, but they didn't look into it at first to know what was going on. On Conover we have a big dirt pile that is supposed to be a school or park as well [and] the concern on Mavrinac could very well happen on Conover years down the road. It is better to be on top of it than behind it and people should learn from their mistakes.?

A long-time coach for various sports, most recently with the York Simcoe Bucs football club, Mr. Etwell says there are significant field shortages in Aurora for a variety of sports and with significant growth set to hit Aurora it is a problem that is only going to grow. He says he sees a potential solution for this field shortage in Mavrinac Park, but points to recreation facilities as a top priority if elected to Council.

?When I coached for the Aurora Jays [Baseball Club] they are little kids but we didn't have enough diamonds or the ability to practice,? he says. ?There are kids in various age groups that are trying to share the diamonds, which is an issue. With the Bucs there are so few practice fields that most of the season we have been practicing on a baseball diamond. Now that the baseball season is over that is pretty much the only space we have available to us.?

Growth will also have an adverse impact on traffic flows, he adds, with a particular focus on the stretch of Wellington Street East between Industrial Parkway and Yonge. That is a particular challenge, he said, particularly at peak times for GO Transit, which spills over into parking issues in nearby residential neighbourhoods, such as parking spaces around Town Park.

?One of the mayoral candidates was talking about adding a St. John's Sideroad exit onto the 404, but that doesn't make sense to me because St. John's already is a single lane and I think an exit [there] onto the 404 would help people from Newmarket, but not overly

help people from Aurora.?

In finding adequate spaces for Aurora's sports teams and solutions for local traffic woes, Mr. Etwell says the biggest challenge Council will have over the next four years is striking a delicate balance for taxpayers.

?People have talked to me about increasing taxes versus the expenditures and a lot of the things I am talking about like traffic flows and sports facilities,? he says. ?A lot of those have costs associated with them, but I think that's the lifestyle we have become accustomed to as Aurorans. We have high standards.

?According to MoneySense's listing of top places to live, we're #24 in Canada for Top Places To Live, but we're in the Top 10 for highest household income. I would prefer that to be in a different order, the Top 10 place to live with our household income a little lower. If we have the money in our households, I don't think tax increases should be what they are really concerned about. The biggest concern we have is spending the money wisely and spending the money where it is needed.?

Over the next week and a half, Mr. Etwell says he is particularly looking forward to meeting more people and interacting with his fellow candidates. While he says you won't find his signs out on the road or campaign literature coming to your door for environmental reasons, he would like to see alternatives to that style of campaigning, citing a letter in last week's edition from former NDP candidate Angus Duff suggesting political hopefuls should take their campaigns online.

?I think it would put everyone on a very equal playing field,? says Mr. Etwell. ?Just look at the pricing of signs. They can be very expensive. They pave the personal financial backing to run for elections, which isn't really what the election should be based on.?