

Abel, Pirri and Thom thank community at the end of Council term



By Brock Weir

The incoming Council will face challenges and it deserves "nothing but our support," according to late Councillor John Abel. Mr. Abel, who died Thursday after suddenly falling ill on Sunday, offered this in his final speech at the Council table on November 27 as his eight year term as Deputy Mayor came to a close.

The final meeting of the 2014 - 2018 Council was also a chance to mark the end of the political road - at least for now - of Paul Pirri and Jeff Thom, who opted not to seek re-election this time around.

"I think the greatest thing I have, in retrospect is, [at my first Council meeting] I didn't know one person in this Council chamber, but now I realise how important it is to have people who are involved in the community, volunteers, are leaders and do great things," said Mr. Abel. "That's what makes any community great, but specifically Aurora. For me, that is the most enriching part. I thought when I was a volunteer in hockey and baseball I was getting involved, but it is really amazing when you're getting involved here with people who make decisions and fantastic staff."

"I think the greatest moment was when I walked into this Town Hall and I realised I was going to be working with staff here in all the departments. Knowing everyone I know in the community, staff and colleagues, it has just been an amazing journey. I never imagined in my life I would be running for the candidacy for mayor. I never considered that, and all my old friends couldn't believe it either. If you believe you can make a difference, and that is what I believed, then do it. I will always cherish that."

Being elected was humbling, he added, and, in congratulating Mayor Tom Mrakas on his win, said, "I know we're in good hands." "I wish everyone here the best of luck," said Mr. Abel. "I know it is going to be a challenge and you deserve nothing but our support going forward, and I know you have it. I wish everyone the best and I thank everyone for giving me this opportunity."

In giving his farewell, Mr. Pirri also had warm words for the new Mayor and Council, praising Mayor Mrakas as being the most "passionate person I think the Town has ever seen," before injecting some humour into the proceedings.

"It has been an absolute honour and privilege to serve the citizens and residents and my friends in Aurora over the last eight years," said Mr. Pirri. "I am reminded of the words of Marx, so this is a bit of a warning to new councils: Politics is the art of looking for trouble, finding it everywhere, diagnosing it incorrectly and applying the wrong remedies. That's Groucho, not Karl! I think there is some truth to that, if you're doing politics in the wrong way. When you're doing it properly, I think it is the complete opposite. I am grateful to have served with everyone I have had the pleasure of serving with."

Going around the table, Mr. Pirri had kind words for each of his colleagues. He praised Councillor Wendy Gaertner for her tenacity. "We haven't always seen eye to eye, nor should we, but I truly appreciate that when there is an issue you believe in, come hell or high water, you will stand for it and I think that is absolutely amazing. Councillor Humfryes, you and I think very differently. I am the analytical guy. You speak from the heart and, just like everyone else around the table, I have learned so much from you in that regard. Councillor Kim, you are guided for all the right reasons. It drives what you do and I think that is why you did so well in the election because people know your heart is and forever will be in the right place. Councillor Thompson, what I was going to say to you is probably the most difficult: I have the utmost respect for who you are as a person and I count you as a friend."

Addressing Geoff Dawe, Mr. Pirri said he was an "outstanding mayor" over his eight years in the job, noting what marks this Council is being able to "push forward" and get things accomplished, despite not always being on the same page. The same could be said about fellow outgoing council members John Abel and Jeff Thom. He said Mr. Abel has "a sense of what is right and wrong" and that Aurorans could always trust he would "fight for that sense of right and wrong."

Having come up through school together, Paul Pirri and Jeff Thom had a unique insight into each other. The former praised the latter for his thorough approach to the job, while the latter praised the former, and indeed all his colleagues around the table, all the best in the years ahead.

Mr. Thom as joined Tuesday night by his father, sister, wife, and their one-week-old daughter Anna. Their elder daughter was home with grandma. His family led his list of thanks.

"I wouldn't obviously be here without their support. I would like to give my heartfelt thanks to all the volunteers across this Town who really make Aurora what it is: they give of their time to make our community a better place and I have had the opportunity to meet with many of them as a Councillor and I don't think I would have had the opportunity had it not been so. It has been great to meet all the volunteers who make our community a great place to live.

"A big thanks to all the residents of Aurora. They have had to put up with all the shenanigans of the Council table. I would like to thank all staff, public servants and the senior leadership team here at Town. I really appreciate all you guys do for making the corporation function as smoothly as possible, again putting up with some of the antics at the Council table, and really to provide the great services to our residents they expect and deserve. I really appreciate sometimes the extra effort you guys put into your jobs and I know the residents do as well.

"Serving as a Town Councillor this term has been a pretty exceptional experience. I am proud of the collective accomplishments as a Council that we moved forward with together. I have very few regrets and I am very hopeful the incoming Council can successfully conclude those projects that are still outstanding, most notably Library Square, the Armoury and the heritage designations of the Yonge Street properties in our historic downtown, just to name a few."