

Abel ready to step back after eight years on Council



By Brock Weir

After a heated municipal election, which followed a contentious second term around the Council table, John Abel is ready to step back and let others do what they were elected to do.

The two-term Councillor, who was first elected Aurora's Deputy Mayor in 2010, is preparing to say farewell later this month at the final meeting of the 2014-2018 Council term on November 27.

It will be a chance to wrap up unfinished business, say goodbye and provide best wishes to those who will be returning in the 2018-2022 term set to begin next month, but it will also be the close of a chapter during which Councillor Abel often found himself at odds with his colleagues.

It's about respecting one another and appreciating that people can have different opinions and that's good, Councillor Abel tells The Auroran when asked to reflect back on this most recent Council term. It allows for intelligent decision-making when you consider all those things and people didn't agree with mine. It was a different Council [from his first] and each Council is different. I would have preferred we work together, but I was kind of on my own in much of the things going on, which isn't great. I stood for what I believed in and what was going on in the community. I was that voice.

But Councillor Abel took his views door to door, forming a platform, and throwing himself into the running to be Aurora's next Mayor.

Needless to say finishing fourth in a field of four candidates left him feeling a bit disappointed in the results, but outside of hitting

the ground earlier with his platform and being more vocal with his concerns sooner in the process, he has few regrets on how things panned out.

?If I had started earlier and if I had raised my concerns at Council, specifically in the last two years with some of the issues, I think those would have helped me get my message out there,? he says. ?I don't think this election was done on issues; I think it was who best managed their campaigns. I haven't really considered what I would have done differently except get my message out sooner and clearer so people would have been alarmed at some of the things I was trying to raise and provide solutions for.

?Apart from the issues that we spent more than we had to on certain capital projects, I thought addressing the seniors' needs, windrow plowing, I thought I had a very good solution to some of the parking issues at the GO Station. I thought the Revolving Investment Fund was a very good approach to addressing the revitalization of the downtown on some major projects, one being the Howard Johnson's. With trying to attract business, I thought the incubator hub and a medical campus on the Hallmark lands was a good idea and those are some of the issues I thought were good coming forward that I put in my platform.?

But, it was not to be.

Looking back over the last eight years, Councillor Abel says he will look back with particular pride on his involvement in the community.

?I basically came in from volunteer coaching in the Little League and, by the end of it, I was involved in several aspects of the community, whether it is cultural, supporting organizations or supporting youth,? he says. ?I am proud to be on the board of the Aurora Seniors' Association, the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame, the Aurora Cultural Centre, and all of these things.?

Particular initiatives he is proud of range from Mavrinac Park (formally known as Thomas Coates Park), advocacy which ultimately led to the York Region District School Board making a decision to move Dr. G.W. Williams Secondary School to a new building on Bayview Avenue at Borealis, and the Town's acquisition of the historic Aurora Armoury ? although the Councillor was at odds with the majority of Council on just how the Armoury would ultimately be used.

Advocating for a new Cultural Services agreement between the Town and the Aurora Cultural Centre during his time on Council is something he also looks back on with pride because it is the issue on which he ?cut his teeth? and made him realise ?I could stand up to people who oppose me and stand there for what I believed.?

?I was proud that I was able to do that with the Cultural Services Agreement, knowing now that the relationship is just fantastic,? he says. ?I am not saying it wasn't because it was very good before with Mayor Morris setting it up, but we wanted to have a little more oversight and being involved like the other organizations by bringing a budget forward and that sort of thing. I think that relationship was really improved.?

As the new Council prepares to take office, Councillor Abel says the incoming body of lawmakers will face challenges and it is important to get up to speed. Among them, he says, is GO Transit and the revitalization of downtown.

While he is stepping away from politics and advocacy, he plans to stay involved in many projects he views as important to his legacy, like the establishment of Music Aurora and giving a hand-up to young budding musicians in our community.

?I am really proud of what I have done and I am looking forward and wishing the best of luck to the Council at hand,? he says. ?I feel I have done my commitment and my duty. I can easily step away out of the spotlight knowing through my experience that Council will address and look after the major challenges they have ? and there are many. It's like what we see across the Province and Region. We all have very similar issues and that is the financing and the business and community involvement. They are in good hands; they have good Council members and staff.?