

VOTE 2014: Aurora is a community 'on the edge', says candidate Michael Ney



By Brock Weir

Aurora is currently "riding on a sharp edge", where it can fall one way or another, says Council candidate Michael Ney.

It can either fall to one side, being left behind, or it can fall the other, spurring the community and its leaders to make challenging decisions on just what they want Aurora to be.

A 30 year resident of Aurora, Mr. Ney looks to his growing up in Stratford as an example of a community in a similar situation. After the railway industry left the area, Stratford was on a downward slide, until local leaders put their heads together to reinvent their community as a top theatrical destination.

"Stratford has completely reinvented itself, and that is the kind of long-range thinking [needed] for Aurora," he says. "It's dramatic thinking, but maybe that is what it needs."

For anything to happen, however, collaboration needs to be fostered not only at the Council table, but in the community as a whole.

"I know things don't happen overnight," says Mr. Ney of skills he would like to bring with him from the business world to the Council table. "You have to get by with collaborative skills to work with people and get everyone moving in the right direction. I hate to use that cliché about everyone being on the same page, but that is basically what it is. If you can get people moving together in the same direction, the whole is much greater than the sum of its parts. You need that impetus to get things going."

Getting people moving "together or individually" is something that has dominated much of Mr. Ney's life. He operates an advertising agency, MPN, which often focuses on the automotive industry, as well as running Pace Motorsports. He balanced his business career being with his family in Aurora, where his children were very active on local sports teams.

Politics, however, had always been on the backburner, but now he wants to get involved.

If elected next Monday, Mr. Ney says the biggest challenge facing Aurora will be "putting together a feasible, long-range plan that is going to drive interest in Aurora." A key component to doing this, he says, will be to cast a new eye on how budgets are developed at Town Hall.

"Budgeting and budgets are two different things," he says. "When you budget, you pull together your anticipated expenses for the coming year and I think what needs to happen in this environment is bring together your budget and [know what you have to work

with. Bumping taxes] really isn't the best way to do it.

?We need to clearly demonstrate to taxpayers that tough decisions are going to be made. Instead of your sidewalks being cleared by 10 a.m. it might be 3.00 in the afternoon before it is done. Our budget is this and we don't want to have to go back for more dollars.?

Mr. Ney counts himself as a supporter of incumbent Geoff Dawe but cites the previous Council as one of missed opportunities when it comes to securing local involvement in next year's Pan-AM games, a lack of the forward-thinking philosophy he promotes.

?I was really disappointed when I heard Oshawa got the baseball for the Pan-AM games and Milton got the velodrome. Where the hell was Council seven or eight years ago to put forward a very strong proposal to the Pan-AM group to say we're on the train line as both Oshawa and Milton are, we're on the 404, what can we do? There are funds specifically available [from the Provincial and Federal] governments available for sports and recreation.?

Had Aurora put a case together on that front, it might have given a head-start to the kind of rebranding exercise the Town needs, he says.

?I see Aurora as riding on that sharp edge right now,? he says. ?We can either fall off one way, or put together a really strong team that has Aurora and the development of Aurora at heart rather than for personal gain, or it can go the other way and continue to function or not function, a group continually scrapping amongst each other. It is about Your Aurora, My Aurora, and Our Aurora.

?We really need strong leadership. There are certain members on Council that want to make changes. I think Geoff has done a wonderful job over the last four years, but it has to continue on a united front. Whenever you start rebranding yourself, the first question you have to ask is, ?Who are we? I don't know that we know who we are. You have to do a study. It is not expensive. I think we clearly need to define who we are, what we think we are, and where we want to go. Then we can redefine Aurora and start building a Brand Aurora.?