

Aurora Votes 2018: Kroeplin focuses on stable neighbourhoods, bringing in ward system



By Brock Weir

Running for Council is not a decision Anna Kroeplin has taken lightly.

The long-time community advocate and volunteer says she has been 'chewing' on the idea for over six years, but with her continued work on behalf of local ratepayers associations and organizations like the Optimist Club of Aurora, she wanted to 'invest' further in the life of her family and of her community.

'I had a family meeting with my husband and daughter; any new project any of us take on, we always meet with each other to [see] how this is going to fit in with our lives because we want to keep that quality as well,' says Ms. Kroeplin. After we talked about it, and I really wanted to wait another four years when my daughter is in university or college, but she said, 'Don't wait for me, mom. Live your dream now.'

Now, that is just what she's doing - and that dream is local.

Ms. Kroeplin comes into this race with over two decades of experience working for local government in another municipality. With this background, she says she knows the process and realises that getting things done can be 'a very slow, frustrating process' but she has never struggled to find her voice. This voice is one that has been heard in the Council Chamber many times over the years, whether she is speaking on behalf of the Aurora Farmers' Market, of which she currently serves as Market Manager, or as a spokesperson for the Town Park Area Ratepayers Association.

'I didn't have it in my mind that I was doing this to run for Council,' she says. 'I have been involved with the Ratepayers for 10 years when we were a teeny tiny group of three people meeting in a friend's kitchen for tea and saying this would be a great idea, and that this is a gap right now that is needed to support the southeast area.'

To this end, Ms. Kroeplin is a proponent of adopting a ward system for Aurora, whereby one elected Councillor is responsible for one particular area of Aurora.

'I think having a ward system is pivotal to the communication for Council by residents,' she explains. 'Instead of having six Councillors now being in charge of 50,000 people, it will be 8,000 people. I think you can be much more effective and get to know the grassroots of your area.'

With this eye to Aurora's downtown core, Ms. Kroeplin says that if she is elected she will bring forward a motion for a new transportation master plan for all of Aurora.

'There are many other plans the Official Plan (OP) has facets of: the Cultural Plan, the Growth Management Plan, the Economic plan, all vital, but I think if we're responsible for future development, especially when we're talking about traffic, we need an overall Transportation Master Plan.'

The OP, she adds, has a traffic plan for the northeast, but more is needed: 'There is 75 per cent more of Aurora that needs to be looked after.'

There is also, of course, myriad established neighbourhoods in the community that need attention as well. These communities, Aurora's 'stable neighbourhoods' have been a particularly hot topic over the past year. Ms. Kroeplin says each impacted ratepayers group has developed strategies to consider in the fight to protect older neighbourhoods, and now is the time to act.

‘I would like to bring those strategies to fruition, to be able to protect these very unique pockets in Aurora because, once you do that, you’re protecting the character of all of Aurora,’ she says, noting Aurorans live here by choice. ‘We want to be in Aurora and there is something about Aurora that speaks to all of us. I grew up in Richmond Hill and moved to Aurora because it reminded me of Richmond Hill a couple of decades ago. It is that hometown feel, except it is vibrant and exciting.’

Essential in this is making sure Aurora’s zoning bylaws are compatible with the Official Plan, she says.

‘With myself working in government, I know all the red tape, I know the baby steps, and I know when to recognize a win,’ she says. ‘You might not get everything you want, but if you get partway, or most of the way there, it is the community that is going to win. It is the ratepayers and it is the taxpayers.’

Downtown Aurora, as it is in most campaigns, is once again turning into a focal point of the election due to the redevelopment of Library Square and the renovations currently taking place at the historic Aurora Armoury to make way for the newest campus of Niagara College’s Canadian Food & Wine Institute.

When it comes to Library Square, Ms. Kropelin says she has been on the ‘inside’ of most meetings due to her participation in the local ratepayers’ association and says it has been a good process.

‘We felt our voice has been heard to have a more pedestrian-friendly area,’ she says, noting there are still some lingering questions on traffic flow. ‘It is very challenging working within the safety realms of making sure there are pedestrian-friendly areas [and] having so much traffic at Yonge and Wellington. The only thing I am disappointed [with the Library Square plans are] the accessibility spaces, or lack thereof, or even the needs of the actual Library.’

‘Living in the southeast area, there is going to be an influx of parking on a residential street. I understand that with the Library Square plan, they are accommodating some extra parking, but I think the Town really has to look at extra parking that is going to be affecting our residents.’

As for the Armoury, while she says she is ‘a little trepidatious’ that the Niagara College deal has a limited lease time and what kind of usable community space Aurora will end up with in the event the College decides not to renew, she is ‘extremely excited’ about the renovations and the possibilities that might come with it.

‘I want to make sure that space is usable, especially for community groups,’ she says. ‘I’m involved in so many community groups and we’re constantly looking for meeting space and activity space and program space. That is another thing I would like Council to look at and hopefully direct staff to making those spaces available. I know that staff has been working very hard to accommodate as many groups as they can but sometimes it falls short.’