

Aurora Votes 2018: Rachel Gilliland is focused on growth and gridlock

By Brock Weir

Rachel Gilliland has seen the community grow rapidly over the last 22 years as an Aurora resident, and now she'd like to help continue to shape the community in the years ahead as a member of Council.

Ms. Gilliland, an entrepreneur, is seeking one of six spots at the Council table in this October's Municipal Election.

"I have been a resident of Aurora for over 22 years now; both my kids have graduated and I'm at a point in my life where I feel I can give back to the community," she tells The Auroran. "I have been watching a lot of things going on with Council currently. I have participated in a few ratepayer associations [including the Town Park Ratepayers Association] and it has allowed me to become more aware of what is going on in our Town, up close and personal."

Now a regular attendee at municipal meetings, Ms. Gilliland says she is seeing a lot of issues crop up for which she'd like to be the residents' voice.

Chief among them, she says, is growth. When she first moved to the community, she said there were cow fields at the end of the street. Those days are certainly gone, but growth, she says, is "inevitable."

"We evolve and we change as we go along," she says. "We're at a point now where we have so much change we're now being faced with more gridlock and [a need for] recreational space, [while] preserving our downtown core and revitalization. There is a lot of attention that is going to be required from someone who wants to commit to making those decisions and I feel I am ready to commit my time and attention to those issues for Aurora."

"First and foremost is finding the ideal balance between development growth and preservation. Second is investing in and keeping Aurora active while responsibly spending money on recreation facilities and protecting our greenspace. With gridlock, everyone knows Yonge and Wellington. There are still condos being developed and we need to find some good solutions and investigate the best way for traffic flow in Aurora."

On the subject of gridlock, Ms. Gilliland says there are currently limited options on what Aurora can do to solve the problem, but exercising pressure on the Region could open up many more possibilities. Another solution, she says, is promoting Industrial Parkway as a bypass for Downtown Aurora, which was its original purpose.

Another issue that has particularly captured Ms. Gilliland's focus is the fight for preserving Aurora's stable neighbourhoods. She says she is looking forward to seeing what the incumbent Council comes back with this September to find balance within stable neighbourhoods and take a positive step forward.

Over the months leading up to October's vote, Ms. Gilliland says she will be continuing her active community involvement. She describes herself as a "jack of all trades" who is currently operating a yearbook publishing business, the territory for which covers all of York Region. Her work focuses on sales and support, as well as in-school training. This work, as well as her work on the local ratepayers' associations has sown the seeds of community involvement, something she is looking to expand.

"I have dealt with all walks of life, lots of people, and having run my own business you need to know how to work with people, listen to ideas, be open to opportunity and not have tunnel vision: be able to receive information, absorb it, and execute a decision that makes sense for the community."

This Municipal Election will see Aurora elect a Mayor and six councillors, rather than the traditional eight members, thus there will be two less people executing those decisions that make sense for the community. When Council made the decision to shrink its membership, many said it was the first step towards Aurora adopting a "ward" system of government, with one Councillor elected to represent the interest of a certain area of the community.

A ward system is something Ms. Gilliland says she supports.

"I think it is time," she says. "We're one of the only municipalities at this population level that doesn't have a ward system. I think it is in our benefit to be able to have a Councillor represent specific areas of your town. I think it allows for a little more personal attention. Although we're structured as a non-ward system right now, I do think it is wonderful that we have six people who are going to be representing the entire community as a whole and I do feel it is important to listen to all parts of Aurora"

"We know what is going on. I have lived in the four corners of Aurora over those 22 years, I don't know how many people can say that, and each community is different in itself. I think it is important that [all communities] are met in an individually unique way? such as stable neighbourhoods. Each stable neighbourhood deserves its own attention."