

Aurora Votes 2022: Affordable housing a top priority for Ward 3 candidate MacDonald



As a life-long resident of Aurora, Harold MacDonald has seen the community grow and develop, but not as a community where his three children can afford a home to call their own.

MacDonald, however, is not standing on the sidelines waiting for change. Instead, he has thrown his hat into the political ring to represent Ward 3 in the 2022-2026 Aurora Council.

First running as a Council candidate more than 30 years ago when his children were young, MacDonald says he wasn't able to put enough time into it. But, now that he's older, time is on his side as are some lessons learned along the way.

An important issue for me is kids wanting to stay in Town and there's no affordability, no affordable housing," he says. "There's a 12-year wait for subsidized housing. There doesn't seem to be a plan by the Town to work with other corporations to generate rental income. The rents are sky-high. It's just not affordable for most people and that was one of the reasons to create more rental space, subsidized housing, and I think it should be a strong priority from the Town."

Had the Town retained its old works yard on Scanlon Court before moving to the new Joint Operations Centre on Industrial Parkway North, this, he says, would have been a prime opportunity to partner with a builder on bringing more affordable units to Aurora.

Another priority for MacDonald is enhancing the Town's trails system. As a dog owner, he and his grandchildren can often be seen on the trails leash in hand and there are further opportunities he would like to explore as a Councillor, including the Anne Bartley Smith lands in the southeast quadrant of Henderson Drive and Bathurst Street.

Henderson itself is a further concern for MacDonald and, he says, the residents he's spoken to on the campaign trail so far.

"[An issue] that is important to people here is speed limits on Henderson," he says. "At night, you get cars and motorcycles ripping down the road. Community safety is a big issue and the other is transportation. There seems to be a really good bus schedule in the morning and a bus schedule at night, but during the day some of the seniors are finding it hard to get around on the transit system."

"There's a very active [cycling] community here, so to have safe biking trails and walking those trails, those are some of the issues that have come up, along with taxes."

As the owner of a construction company for more than 20 years, development is a key issue to which MacDonald would like to lend

his voice at the Council table. This is particularly prevalent in the areas of preserving the Town's Stable Neighbourhoods and in looking at ways to revitalize Aurora's historic downtown core.

‘I have watched other people develop in the area; some have done it really well and some have done it poorly,’ he says. ‘We have to grow. The Regional mandate is to grow and having controlled growth is extremely important to me personally. I understand the whole process of developing and building, so I hope to bring some experience in that way to the Town and hopefully a very practical perspective.’

‘A lot of developers have bought up a lot of the heritage properties along Yonge Street and [it's a matter of] how to renovate and still keep the facades of the buildings there and allowing for some of the growth in the downtown core, which is going to be very challenged,’ he adds. ‘Connecting the Library to Town Park seems to be very disjointed. I love going to Town Park but how do we get the flow of people so that they can go from the Town Park to the Downtown Core and still retain that heritage look that we have?’

‘I don't want to say how I would do it, but I would definitely work with the rest of Council and the Mayor to develop some kind of strategy for the Downtown Core. There's Hillary House, there's many beautiful buildings in the Downtown Core that should be preserved not just Hillary House, but all the storefronts and stuff. How do we allow some growth and still keep the heritage feel of the Downtown Core?’

One of the chief projects the 2018-2022 Council has invested in to revitalize the core has been the Town Square redevelopment. This is a project MacDonald says he has mixed feelings on due to the amount of money that was invested. But, he adds, its success needs to be realized.

‘I'm sure it's going to be a great facility; I would have loved to have had a whole corridor to Town Park and not just right there but I think they spent a lot of money and that's a lot of taxpayers' dollars,’ he says. ‘We just have to make sure they use it, that people have access to it. ‘Use’ of it would be the operative word. There's no sense building it if no one is going to be there. It's promoting it and making sure people are using it.’

By Brock Weir
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