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Aurora Votes 2022: Development in Ward 3 a top issue for candidate Owen Heritage

As a nearly life-long resident of Aurora, Owen Heritage has seen the community grow and develop. Now, as a candidate in Ward 3 in next month's municipal election, he wants to be a voice at the table to help steer growth in appropriate ways.

Running for Council has always been a goal for Heritage, who has lived in the community since 1984, and now that his business, Powell, has moved to Aurora in the old Baldwin's building, this is a prime opportunity to realise that goal, he says.

?I have always wanted to be involved ? I love the Town,? says Heritage. ?I grew up in Ward 3 and I think that area needs some attention because there's lots of changes in development. We need to focus on that area and develop the area in a way that's good for residents [of the ward]. A lot of decisions that get made aren't always good for the residents in the area.?

Development in Ward 3 is a ?huge issue,? he says, as it is all over Aurora.

The redevelopment of Highland Gate has reduced green space in Ward 3, while many people moving into the area are tearing down existing houses and building new ones.

?How are you changing the community to benefit the community versus benefiting different people's agendas?? he asks. ?The key to Aurora is to keep everyone able to live in Aurora. Affordable housing is a big issue. I run a business in Town and the issue that I have with our employees is having them move further and further away from us. The cost for them to come into work is greater and greater because they can't afford to live in the area. We need to focus on affordable housing as well as development and find the balance between the two. [Ward 3] is a prime example of where this needs to happen.?

Ward 3 is an ?older, established neighbourhood? with some unique issues compared to the rest of Aurora, he says. The Town has a unique community feel, he adds, but there needs to be limitations ?on what we do and what we're allowed to change.?

?We don't want to be like our neighbours and grow vertical and have high storeys and lots of population; it changes the mix of what it is,? he says. ?People moved to Aurora for that family feel and we need to keep that.?

While Council has focused on the redevelopment of the Town's historic downtown core, as well as areas he describes as the north end of Town, not enough focus has been placed on what is considered to be the community's southern tier. The focus on the core makes sense, he says, due to its centrality, but it is time to look beyond that.

?We're focusing right now on the central part of Town but you have to involve the south end of Town because there's lots of real estate there that can happen to make it more community-based,? he says, adding parkland specifically. ?We don't have the same real estate [as Main Street, Newmarket] as we have a thoroughfare as our main street, but you can do things as an off-branch to that area to draw people in and draw in community aspects, whether it is restaurants and different boutiques to draw people. I am not opposed to development as long as it is a low-rise structure, but the ground floor has to be something that will support the local community within that ward.?

Part of this community spirit, he says, should be an emphasis on the multicultural aspect of Aurora and, if elected, Heritage says he would like to foster different events to bring about cultural exchanges so Aurora residents from all parts of the world can understand each other and come together.

For newer residents of the community, there are specific reasons they were drawn to Aurora and these need to be kept in mind as the Town looks to the future.

?It's a family-built community,? says Heritage of the potential for infill development. ?We want to keep that feel to it. You want to be careful with what you do in terms of taking away the look and feel of Aurora, from architectural?.and what draws people to Aurora. Aurora is a special community that draws a lot of people. It's a place where people want to live, but if you change the makeup too much, it won't be as attractive to people and businesses at the same time. There's a balance there and we don't want to tip the scale.

?The big issue for me is development and what we can do. You want to look at the efficiency of what the Council does and how quickly things can move through and what holds it up. My background [in business] is moving things along and efficiencies, and I think Council has done a great job but we need to build some efficiencies and speed into what we're doing and we need somebody driving things through. We need to speed up some of the actions in the Town so that residents, if they have a concern, actually see some results in a timely manner.?

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter