

Aurora Votes 2022: Gaertner focused on 'protecting residents and businesses' in Ward 3



As Aurora's longest-serving Council member, Wendy Gaertner is not afraid to sometimes find herself in the minority when it comes to a municipal decision. But, as the Town's longest-serving lawmaker, differing views are 'just good for democracy.'

Gaertner, who is in the middle of her sixth municipal election campaign, says she often finds herself going against the grain when it comes to issues of development and environment, but 'I don't think you get re-elected four times without people having a pretty good idea of what you stand for.'

'I have been very clear about that and I am able to speak up at Council,' says Gaertner, who is looking for another mandate from voters in Ward 3. 'It's hard when you're going to be the only opposing vote.'

Should she be returned to the Council table, one of the key areas Gaertner says she's looking forward to tackling is the Town's new Official Plan, which is expected to come before the new Council in the first quarter of 2023.

'I want to ensure it has strong protection to maintain our employment land because it's so important for taxes and jobs, and the more employment tax we can bring in, the more we can offset the taxes that residents and businesses pay,' she says. 'Protection for the environment [is another priority], including strict protection for trees. To me, the Fundamental Principles [in the new Official Plan] of providing a range and mix of housing, including affordable, and the principle of building a greener community'those are the things I really want to make sure are in the Official Plan.

'If I win, I have the goal of protecting the residents and businesses in my ward. I think it is very important to look at the big picture and what's in the best interests of the whole Town. Taxpayers, when you go door-to-door, they always want to know about taxes. Whatever is currently happening [with] our future capital expenditures, it's really important to keep your eye on spending taxpayer money with common sense. We don't have much land for big planning developments and, to me, some of them have been an issue with protecting the environment. Whatever is still on the table [this Council] and whatever comes in the future, that's of great importance to me. We have all seen what's happening with climate change.'

Zeroing on the issues that impact Ward 3 specifically, Gaertner says that traffic on Henderson Drive, particularly speeding and noise from truck traffic, is of particular concern. There are no traffic lights, she says, beyond self-activated pedestrian signals, and 'there are no traffic calming measures.'

'We can do traffic calming on Henderson,' she says, noting that more work needs to be done in the upcoming term to protect environmentally sensitive lands in the area, including the so-called Henderson Forest. 'We have a long way to go to protect that land and it is really important land.'

While Gaertner is a veteran of municipal election campaigns, this one will be different in that she's running in a specific ward rather than to serve all of Aurora. She voted against Aurora adopting a Ward System, a position she still holds, despite it making it easier to knock on the doors of all potential constituents.

'We had two concerns from residents: there wasn't enough consultation and there was no choice to say 'no wards' when they did the survey,' she contends. 'The last referendum was very close. People were quite angry that there wasn't a choice to say, 'Leave it as is.' It's quite an interesting thing when you vote against something that will be better for you!'

Looking back at votes in the outgoing Council term, Gaertner says she's particularly proud of motions she brought forward to look at policies to maintain and protect Aurora's tree canopy. 'Right now we have a compensation policy and you can have clear cutting of land and I think a lot of people are upset by that' and a motion to improve communications between municipal staff and residents.

'There seems to be a missing link in the communication process that has angered a lot of residents,' she says. 'It's important that we keep our residents in the information loop because when we don't do that it makes them angry and it causes problems, and it's unfair to residents. I want to ensure that all the protections possible are in place with respect to noise, with respect to garbage, with respect to parking hazardous equipment on the road. Redevelopment is very hard for a neighbourhood and even when it is just one house it can go on for quite a while.'

'My over-arching goal is to listen. We are elected to help our residents and our businesses to create the very best community we can. I have a degree in sociology, I don't have a degree in finance, the environment, climate change. I never worked in building construction or design. I am not in need of an affordable place to live, I live in the Aurora Village Co-op. I need to listen to the people who feel strongly about these issues.'

By Brock Weir
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