

Aurora Votes 2022: Preserving stable neighbourhoods top of mind for Ward 2 candidate Di Girolamo



Parks, trails and green spaces were some of the key drivers that led to Marco Di Girolamo settling in Aurora with his family.

Trails and active transportation were always important for the former rugby player, who will be inducted into the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame this fall, and now, as a candidate, their preservation and that of existing neighbourhoods are top of mind as he vies to become Aurora's next Councillor for Ward 2.

"I live in Aurora and want to give back to the community that has given so much to me," says Di Girolamo. "My wife and I chose to raise our children here so I really wanted to be involved in the fabric of what this community is. I find that being on Council and being accessible to people is the way to do it."

One of the reasons that prompted him to seek a voice at the table, he says, is reaching out to incumbent Council members on a particular issue and getting a response from "only a few."

"I felt this wasn't the way it should be," he says. "If you're going to be in politics, you have to support the community and the people that are in the community. I feel now is the time [to run]. I love this place and I want to stay here. I have lived in different communities across this country from coast to coast and we chose to make this our home and we might as well make it the best home for myself and my family as well as everybody else."

While a resident of Ward 1, Ward 2 is where Di Girolamo's children go to school and where the family first planted roots.

Both wards have a slice of the Town's Yonge Street and Historic Downtown corridors and both their share of stable neighbourhoods. As a candidate, both the Town's stable neighbourhoods and downtown revitalization are close to the hearts of Di Girolamo and his neighbours.

Any development like Town Square that's going to draw people into the core is a "good thing," he says, and will be a "great meeting spot" once it's complete. But, it's not the only facet of the downtown that should be looked at.

"The revitalization of Yonge Street is huge to the Town," he says. "You hear a lot of people talk about Newmarket's downtown and how it is so pedestrian-friendly and I think once Town Square is built and we revitalize and get a lot of foot traffic downtown, it is very important to the businesses that are here in this part of it. [The residents of Ward 2] are so concerned with the downtown core but there's lots of neighbourhoods within Ward 2 that need some revitalization."

Key factors in that revitalization elsewhere is a focus on infill development, the Community Standards Act, making sure there's room for both revitalization and growth.

'It needs to be done within the character of the neighbourhood. You can't thrust upon people your vision of what their town should be. You should listen to what they have to say and work within those guidelines of what their issues are, specifically the big, giant houses next to the older bungalows. You have a diverse mix of housing stock; we have co-ops, wartime bungalows, back splits, side splits. We have massive mansions, new builds, so there is an eclectic mix. Apartments, long-term care. It's kind of all encompassing. You need to listen to the residents in trying to fit in their vision for their hometown because ideally it is their home. It's my home as much as it is their home. You want to grow within their guidelines. It's something that's great for the Town for this generation and for future generations.'

What's on the books right now when it comes to protecting Stable Neighbourhoods is a 'good start' but there's always room for improvement, he adds.

'We need to sort of capture more of what those little communities are, what makes the communities, what made those people stay for 30, 40 or 50 years? There's a draw to them. A lot of residents are like, 'We love Aurora. We don't want to leave Aurora. We just want to see some of this dealt with' and when we speak be heard.' A lot of what they are saying is possibly going on deaf ears. We can't stop growth, we can't stop progression. Ideally, where they are now, maybe somebody didn't want that development but there are ways to fit that in that's beneficial for everyone involved and all the stakeholders.

'One of the things that drew us to the community was all the walking trails and making sure these new developments ' like the Shining Hill Development, any new developments that are coming along Leslie, just giving people places to stay, things to do. A lot of that dealing with sort of the infill is not just an issue in Ward 2, it is an issue across the Town and the older neighbourhoods, just making sure that is done in good sequence and good governance, responding to residents and being accountable.'

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