

Aurora Votes 2022: Ward 1 candidate Ron Weese focused on affordable housing, downtown core



Ron Weese, through his work as founder of Sport Aurora, knows the value of volunteerism and community building and this is something he wants to further and highlight at the Council table.

Weese, a familiar face in the local sporting community for more than 15 years, is in the race to be the next Council member for Ward 1, an unusually-shaped ward which covers diverse density and terrain in the community.

The geography of the ward might be a challenge, but its multifaceted diversity has, in his view, underscored a multitude of issues he'd like to advocate for as the community's representative at Town Hall.

"I've lived in Ward 1 for 38+ years and I am very interested in the unique nature of this community," he says. "We've got different challenges, geography, as well as socio-economic issues and there's a lot of diversity in terms of challenges and interests. I like what is happening with the Ward System. I think that, if it is done right, we can lay a foundation for a lot of community involvement, which I think is really important in the Council chamber."

Looking specifically at Ward 1, Weese says he would like to see further community input on landmarks within the area that are "unique cultural and historical" assets of the "Old Town" area.

"Preserving heritage and culture is a priority for me and it's a priority for a lot of my neighbours and I have been working recently with the Town Park Area Ratepayers Association [on] this new [multi-unit] development on Berczy Street [which] has the potential to be a very disruptive circumstance on this part of Town with construction, with a variety of things that are not probably acceptable to many of the people in Town. However, on the other hand, development is necessary given the priorities of the Provincial government.

"The GO Train separation is another one that has a lot of disruption and I think protection of this community around Town Park is going to be of interest and require a lot of community input."

As the community emerges from the pandemic, Weese sees some previously lost opportunities that could be back in play.

The historic Aurora Armoury, now home to Niagara College's Canadian Food & Wine Institute, has, he says, got "off to a rocky start" and "deserves some attention by the people in this community because it has the opportunity to become a very exciting community hub."

"It's important that the people in these neighbourhoods are involved in how the Library and Town Square is going to be managed

because that is on the table and people are looking at it right now, but I haven't seen a lot of consultation in how that's been done. Similarly with the Armoury, we haven't seen traditional post-secondary activity that was expected out of there, but that is probably a COVID-related issue and I think as we come out of that you want to try and make the Armoury a great success and it definitely has the potential to do so.?

Beyond these community assets, Weese says he's been listening to his neighbours on issues ranging from train whistles to development ? citing the Shining Hill development on St. John's Sideroad as a ?pretty good example of how the community has rallied around to make sure that development occurs in the proper direction ? as well as the importance of social housing in an affordability crisis.

?My children can't afford to live here, for example, and the availability of affordable housing is a difficult and tricky thing to manage, but I think if we don't get affordable housing here either for owning or renting, then younger people will not be moving into this Town and we have a chance that this may become a retirement bedroom community for people who are simply wealthy. I don't think that's a healthy thing for any community.

?How would the development of that happen? I understand, of course, it is not the purview of our own local Town Council. It has a lot of influence from the Region but there are some things that can be done to encourage that type of thing so it is not disruptive to neighbourhoods and it's integrated. Most of the people that are experts in the area of affordable or social housing understand that integration is a key as opposed to segregation. That is something that is of interest to me because I have worked with the All Kids Can Play program, Welcoming Arms, [and] I am acutely aware of some of the needs of people who are less financially fortunate.

?As someone once said, ?The quality of any community is judged by how you take care of the most vulnerable' and I am not sure that's being done here.?

A further priority, he adds, is fostering ?significant development in diversity, equity and inclusion? strategies so Aurora is a leader for other communities.

?It starts with awareness. It comes through capacity building. The results are?having sustainable programs that are inclusive. They just need help to get started.?

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter