

UPDATED: Candidates "livid" over campaign flyer claims

By Brock Weir

Council candidates say they are 'disgusted' and 'livid' that their names were used on campaign literature that was distributed to several Aurora homes on Wednesday.

Homes in certain areas of Town received 'door hanger' flyers denouncing several incumbent Council members seeking re-election for a litany of issues ranging from Aurora's recently approved Joint Operations Centre and the former Aurora Jazz+ Festival, which has since relocated to Newmarket.

Instead of stopping at advising voters on who not to vote for, the distributors, who are billed as 'Concerned Citizens of Aurora' went a step further by advising recipients which mayoral candidate to vote for, and provided a list of eight council candidates for their consideration.

The 'Citizens' endorsed mayoral candidate John Gallo, as well as council candidates Roy Cohen, Wendy Gaertner, James Hoyes, Harold Kim, Alice Lalas, Tom Plamondon, Anthony Pullano, and Linda Stephens.

Rather than taking these endorsements as a shot in the arm, however, they say they are 'disgusted' and 'livid' by the campaign literature.

Mr. Gallo described his reaction as one of 'complete disgust' at the creators, particularly if they are among his supporters.

'It is not something I condone and in everything I have done I have stayed as positive as I could be, and I feel it is a nasty thing to do,' he said. 'I couldn't believe it until I saw it and tried to go through my head on who has possibly done this. It is either someone who is playing a nasty trick, or someone who thinks they are being helpful.'

Ms. Stephens said the content of the ad was 'slanderous', particularly if it gives the impression that she endorses the claims.

'I have done everything I can to run a clean campaign,' she said. 'I have always believed if you have nothing nice to say then to not say anything. I know there is some behind-the-scenes vote pulling between different candidates and there is some animosity between candidates, but I have stayed away from that. To suddenly find myself blackballing specific candidates on a ballot, I am livid.'

'Is it democratic in that people have a right to say what they feel? Yes, I suppose so, but to me it sounds like there is a real behind-the-scenes vendetta. For someone to go to so much printing costs and take time to arrange to have it distributed has to have a personal agenda, which I have never been about. I am horrified, livid and so devastated.'

Ms. Lalas said she was out on the campaign trail on Wednesday afternoon in one of the neighbourhoods where this door hanger had been distributed. As she was handing out flyers at households she noticed her name on the campaign literature. Upon close inspection, she said, she rethought her campaign route that day in case they thought she was associated with it.

'I saw my name and I have no idea who the Concerned Citizens are,' she said. 'I appreciate the endorsement, but I am not affiliated with them and do not actually want my name on there because I am not in favour of bashing other candidates or any of that pettiness.'

'I am not sure how they decided which candidates they were choosing to endorse [because I was not asked about these causes, and] the stuff they are blaming on the incumbents is not something we can say they are a part of. There is not actually evidence they caused any of those problems.'

Mr. Pullano says he first saw the flyer on social media and took immediately to Twitter to give his 'word of honour' he had nothing to do with it.

'I like the cartoons, but I had nothing to do with it,' he said. 'Whoever did this obviously wants it to look like it is from John Gallo'

and John would never have done that, at least without consulting us, or the people involved in the name game. Whoever did it is obviously trying to politically harm the current Council, and for their own reasons ? and they gave you the reasons. I think this was done independently by someone, not of the names on the list. A concerned group did it on their own initiative, that is what I think.?

He added he did not believe the flyer would negatively impact their campaigns as voters at this point had already made up their minds.

?I don't know if this was distributed town-wide, I don't know if someone printed 100, 500, distributed it locally, or even to get media attention. Most people who received this stuff by now they're so inundated with politics in Aurora that they just throw them in the garbage.?

In an email, Ms. Gaertner said she too knew nothing about the flyer in question until seeing a copy online and after receiving an email from Mr. Gallo.

?It is upsetting that anybody would do this,? she said.

On the flipside, incumbent mayoral candidate Geoff Dawe said a flyer addressing Wednesday's mailing went out to residents on Friday. He characterized the initial pamphlet as ?pretty disgusting and full of lies.?

?Or, as I like to say, untruths, half-truths and innuendos,? he said. ?The facts aren't even close to being right.?

While he said the points raised on the pamphlet were untrue, one he found particularly offensive was the claim Aurora's Sesquicentennial cost Aurora \$250,000 when, in reality, the actual cost was closer to \$100,000.

?To take something that was celebrating the Town's history and to try and turn it into something that was grossly wrong or inappropriate just beggar's belief,? said Mr. Dawe. ?It is such a slam on volunteers because the whole thing was volunteer-led. It is so offensive it is difficult to put into words.?

After one woman received the pamphlet, Mr. Dawe says she came to Town Hall to say she was ?just disgusted? this sort of politicking was going on in Aurora. He reiterated, he said, he is focusing on a positive campaign.

?We're concentrating on working sure we continue to prosper as a Town,? he said. ?We're going to stay on the positive road and we're going to stay on the high road. If special interest groups want to exercise this way, so be it. There is nothing we can do about that, but people should be well aware that it is a special interest group that is driving it. We're interested on running a positive campaign, we're intent on stressing what our vision and goals are for the future of Aurora and we're staying that way all the way through.?

A similar view was offered by council candidate Michael Thompson, who said he is countering the claims with literature of his own that he is taking door-to-door as he hands out his own flyers. In it, he says ?negative ads only serve to perpetuate the politics of division.?

?It is always unfortunate to see that kind of negative ad,? Mr. Thompson told The Auroran. ?I would hope this time around it would be a much more positive campaign that is based on ideas and vision, but I guess these things do happen. It's a small special interest group with an axe to grind. The general consensus [has been] it is disappointing something like that would be out in the marketplace. The reaction was opposed to these kinds of negative tactics.?

Claims that the Joint Operations Centre budget is now \$30 million simply isn't true, he said, nor are claims that the reserves are overdrawn by \$8 million. He also refuted the claims about the Sesquicentennial figures.

?I am hopeful that if anyone were to get [the flyer] they would pick up the phone and call any of the Councillors who are on the

front of the flyer and we would be happy to speak to any one of those points,? he added. ?To me, I think part of this is geared towards those who are not as engaged in what is happening in Aurora as much as the others.?