

IN GOOD COMPANY: Doing the Right Thing

By Mayor Geoffrey Dawe

I suspect that only in Canada we have May temperatures falling below zero degrees some evenings, while rocketing to nearly 28 degrees at mid-day. Though the ups and downs continue, (as I write this, it is sunny but only 11 degrees) I am sure we will get warm sunny weather soon!

We were blessed with gorgeous weather on May 5 for the Aurora 150 Tattoo, which featured lunch with our own Queen's York Rangers, a kid-friendly 'mudder' obstacle course and some exceptionally well-choreographed performances by dancers, community bands and pipes and drum bands at the Aurora Community Centre.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank our Aurora 150 Committee volunteers again for all their hard work in delivering the second of four great sesquicentennial events, as well as the more than 40 Town staff who volunteered their time to assist with the event.

It was with a healthy dose of incredulity that I started writing this month's In Good Company article, as I watched multiple political scandals engulf the Office of the Mayor of Toronto, the Prime Minister's Office and the Senate over the past few weeks.

I am not going to add to the copious amount of commentary on these issues, save to point out that although these matters are taking place under widely different sets of circumstances, they all have commonalities. At some level, there was a breakdown in good judgement by elected (or appointed) officials, compounded by finger-pointing and a lack of personal responsibility.

At a time of historically low public approval for those in politics, this lack of integrity offers ample justification for this sentiment.

While not nearly as salacious, Town Council grappled with a similar lack of consideration concerning the recent citing of a Bell cellular communications tower in King Township along Bathurst Street. Through multiple articles in our local media, residents have been made abundantly aware of Industry Canada's decision to forge ahead with this 60-metre tower adjacent to hundreds of homes in Aurora.

As resident concerns about the tower were heard at Town Hall Special Council meetings and as my office engaged in discussions with Bell and Industry Canada, work proceeded unabated and the tower was activated.

Neighbouring residents were right to be angry about this tower installation. Notification and overall communication were clearly lacking. What underpins this process however, is the lack accountability.

No one disputes that we need cellular service. As our appetite for increasingly powerful wireless devices increases, so too does our need for supporting infrastructure. What is absent here is a common set of standards that gives opportunity for input from affected residents and a mechanism where this input is given due consideration.

When The Town of Aurora has planning applications that affect our neighbours, those neighbours are informed, invited to participate and have their concerns addressed. While it seems like common courtesy, the lack of information on the cellular tower siting clearly shows that the sentiment isn't universal.

With more applications for towers coming forward, there is no better time to set consistent standards for public consultation. Our Council is pushing for these standards. Our residents deserve a fair and accountable process, not one that treats their opinions as afterthoughts.

In discussing opportunities to improve participation in political decision-making, I am very pleased that The Regional Municipality of York will be considering my motion to have additional representation at York Regional Council in 2014. Those who follow my

column will know that I have supported increased representation for Aurora and the other municipalities in the region who have a lone representative at the Council table.

Having an additional representative would ensure that Aurora's interests are represented in the event that I am unable to attend a committee meeting, Council meeting or Council workshop. York Region's larger communities enjoy this level of representation. Let's do the right thing and make sure the smaller communities get the same opportunities.

I hope to see many of you out at our great upcoming events. The 18th Annual Aurora Chamber of Commerce Street Festival will have all types of vendors along Yonge Street on June 2, so make sure you come out for a great afternoon.

Our Canada Day weekend festivities are quickly approaching, with fireworks, a parade, Dance in the Park, Aurora Teen Idol and legendary rockers Lighthouse performing to celebrate our Sesquicentennial.

It's not too late to give credit to those who give back to our Town! Community Recognition Award nominations are still being accepted. Forms are available on our website. Please take time to nominate a deserving resident or group.