

Mayor reflects on year of 'positive change'

Change is inevitable,
but how does one go about ensuring such change is positive?

For Mayor Tom Mrakas,
it depends on 'taking purposeful action.'

That is the message
he brought to the local business community last Wednesday afternoon at the
Aurora Chamber of Commerce's annual Mayor's Luncheon, hosted at the Royal
Venetian Mansion.

Here, Mayor Mrakas
delivered the annual 'State of the Town' address, one which focused on
'positive change' that has been, he said, the hallmark of the last twelve
months.

'While reflecting on
this past year and what we have achieved together, one constant theme has
emerged: positive change,' he told the 250-strong audience. 'From the opening
of the Canadian Food & Wine Institute (CFWI) in the newly-renovated
historic Aurora Armory, to the first event of the York University Scholars Hub,
from the approval of our new Economic Development Strategic Plan, to the
positive impacts of changes to Development Charges for major office
developments, it has been an exciting year of positive change in Aurora.

'The question is how
do we ensure we get more? It is true: change is inevitable, but whether that
change represents an obstacle or opportunity rests entirely in our hands. Our
future 'tomorrow, five years, ten years, 20 years from now' is entirely
dependent on what we do now. I believe in effecting positive change, in taking
purposeful action towards a desired outcome. In other words, getting things
done and done right. Positive change isn't a given, it doesn't just happen, it
takes a shared commitment by all of us: community, business, Council members
alike, to work together for a better future and in just one short year, we have
seen the results of that strong, shared commitment.'

Among the results, he
said, was Aurora welcoming 73 new businesses over the last year, most of which
would be classified as small businesses, as well as 3.4 per cent employment
growth.

The last year also
saw the realization of several projects Mayor Mrakas characterized as 'key
economic development initiatives' 'top of which, he said, was the arrival of
the CFWI.

'This extraordinary

repurposing of one of our heritage buildings is an important milestone in the revitalization of the downtown core," he said. "In November, we hosted the grand opening of the building and it has been a huge success to date. The transformation of the building itself is absolutely incredible. It is a stunning combination of modern functionality and historical aesthetic.

"Our partnership with Niagara College and the Canadian Food and Wine Institute has already had a positive impact on our community. Through the CFWI, the space is being used for culinary classes, wine tasting, corporate team building, special events, lectures, and a host of other activities that offer endless opportunities for our residents and visitors."

The Armoury is just one project key to this Council's vision for downtown revitalization. The centrepiece of the vision is the redevelopment of Library Square. In his speech, Mayor Mrakas highlighted Council's approval of the budget required to bring Library Square to fruition and the financing plans needed to issue a tender package for Library Square's construction.

"As you all know, a thriving downtown isn't just good news for businesses in the core, it is good news for all businesses," he said.

But, Mayor Mrakas added that not all change is positive.

The negative impacts of climate change are already being seen in "virtually every aspect of our lives" and "in ways we have yet to understand," he said.

"In fact, it may not even be us sitting in this room who have to deal with the full impact of climate change," he said. "It will be our children and our children's children and I don't think we want that to be our legacy. It is clear we need to take action, but what? What can we do as residents, as business owners, as a Town, to positively address climate change? The answer, unfortunately, isn't as simple as a motion or two to Council. Just as our climate is a complex interaction of multiple environmental factors, the response that climate change will necessarily be similarly complex.

"Aurora has taken positive steps over the past two decades to proactively address climate change. We joined the Climate Protection program in the early 2000s and have taken direct steps to reducing greenhouse gas emissions through our Corporate Energy Management Plan, the Building Condition Assessment and Energy Audit, and the Town-wide green development guidelines. We have also recognized the importance of trees in managing climate change by implementing initiatives to increase our tree canopy, improve our tree biodiversity, and reduce the number of trees that can be cut down. These are all good initiatives and many of our neighbouring

municipalities have undertaken similar good initiatives to combat climate change, but climate change doesn't end at municipal borders.

?To effect real change, we need to take an integrated region-wide approach to finding solutions that work. The Regional Climate Change Action Plan looks to do just that. This plan, to be presented to Regional Council soon, will outline both the mitigation and adaptation measures we, as individual municipalities and the Region, can implement to address climate change in our communities.?

By Brock Weir