

New Mayor and Council prepare to set the tone, goals for the next four years



By Brock Weir

If a Council is a team, some might see the Mayor as it's captain.

While Aurora's incoming team captain is keeping the goals he's preparing to outline at the inauguration of the 2018-2022 Council next Tuesday under his hat, Mayor-Elect Tom Mrakas says he's excited to bring the team together to reach common objectives. The formal inauguration might be set for December 4, but Mr. Mrakas ? along with Councillors-elect Harold Kim, Wendy Gaertner, Michael Thompson, Sandra Humfries, Rachel Gilliland and John Gallo ? officially take office this Saturday, December 1. Either way, they're ready to hit the ground running.

?I am honoured and humbled to have been chosen by the residents to move forward with the Town over the next four years,? says Mr. Mrakas. ?What I have heard from residents [since the October 22 election] is they are excited for the next four years, and everyone is looking forward to getting to see how things roll out over the next four years, myself included, and we're looking forward to actually getting to work starting December 1.

?People are excited about the Downtown Core. They feel this is a turning point in the Town and that we actually, with the beginning developments of Library Square, we're going to be making that leap to the next level. I think everyone is excited about having that downtown that we can call unique and call our own. There will be a special place everyone in the Town can gather.

?Our mandate (of the incoming Council] has been somewhat built over the four years previously. I have some thoughts and visions for the Town that I have been moving forward as a Councillor as well, and now in the position of Mayor, I can have that vision set forth and work as a team with all of Council to push for that mandate.?

Looking back over his first four years around the Council table, the Mayor-Elect says he is proud of his record, working with his Council colleagues to pass 33 of the 35 motions he brought forward as a Councillor. There is nothing, he says, that he feels they didn't work on as a group. Some of these things need to continue, he says, along with some fresh ideas that will be brought forward. The new Council brings a new dynamic, he added, and he thinks it will bring some fresh perspectives to some ongoing issues that the outgoing Council has tackled.

?There's an excitement in the air from Council itself that we're going to accomplish a lot of things over the next four years that are going to make our community that much better,? says Mr. Mrakas, noting he has met with all six of his incoming Council colleagues since the election. ?There's an excitement to move forward with a lot of things. [The outgoing Council] did a great job. Everyone worked hard and, as I have always said, everyone brings something unique to the table. We all respect each other's opinions, even though we don't agree all the time, but I think the Council that is leaving did an excellent job when it comes to that. I think that is what part of my campaign was about: that we need some new direction and some new leadership, and I think that is one of the main differences that is going to be occurring with this new Council. We do have new leadership and we will be moving forward with positive change.?

Tom Mrakas and Geoff Dawe were the first individuals to throw their hats into the ring this past spring, just minutes after registrations for the 2018 Municipal Election campaign officially opened. They were joined in the race by former MPP and councillor Chris Ballard and Councillor John Abel.

Over the ensuing five months, Mr. Mrakas says he was "overwhelmed" by the amount of people who reached out to him, or called with offers of help.

"They just wanted to be a part of it," he says of his campaign, "whether it came to handing out flyers, wanting to write an endorsement, or whatever it was. I think that was the biggest thing that said to me my message of positive change was reaching a wide-audience within the Town."

Nevertheless, over 60 per cent of eligible voters stayed home on October 22.

When asked how he might approach reaching out to this 60 per cent over the next four years to engage them in the civic process, Mayor-Elect Mrakas says he will continue what he has been doing over the last four years in providing updates through social media and the local paper as well as "communicating with residents on a personal level as well, whether it is possibly instituting some Town Halls [or] meeting with residents in the park."

"All that helps get residents engaged and I think the more informed and engaged residents are, the more excited they are to get out during election time and cast their vote."

Perhaps the first step in this process is coming out next Tuesday, December 4 at 7 p.m. for the Council Inauguration. Open to the public, the Mayor-Elect says this is an important opportunity for residents to come out and see first-hand the people they elected to represent them in action.

"It is a good way for everyone that did vote to come out and not just the people that voted, but everyone within the Town to see the energy and the excitement, not just from residents, not just from the Town itself, but from Council, the Mayor and all of us," he says.

"I believe there is an excitement between Council itself. I have had meetings with every single Councillor-elect and everyone is excited, ready to go, to roll up their sleeves, and I believe we're going to be a working Council. I believe that excitement is going to come out during the inauguration and I believe it is something everyone would want to be a part of and see."