

Standing room only as mayor and council hopefuls take centre stage



By Brock Weir

It was standing room only at Town Hall on Sunday afternoon as Aurora's two mayoral candidates, 27 of 28 Council candidates, and a number of candidates for school trustee took centre stage in the second all-candidates meeting of the municipal campaign.

Focusing on their respective experiences, and what they have each achieved during their respective terms around the Council table, John Gallo and Geoff Dawe laid out two visions for Aurora's future.

Taking to the podium first in the debate, hosted by former deputy mayor Bob McRoberts and hosted by the Aurora Public Library, Mr. Gallo said he "cared deeply" about Aurora's future.

"I believe the citizens of Aurora are our greatest assets," he said. "As Councillor, I have met with many to find out what they want for our future. Many are just as passionate as I am about our Town, devoted to its improvement, longing for involvement in the decisions Council makes that affect them, and that is why I have developed, with their input, Imagine Aurora 2030."

Mr. Gallo formally unveiled this 10-point plan last Wednesday evening. It calls for the creation of a Citizen's Advisory Task Force to foster resident engagement, bringing a hotel and conference centre to Aurora, revitalization of the Downtown Core, housing needs for young and old, new transportation options, environmental protection, regional collaboration, efforts to further Aurora's quality of life, and getting the best value for the tax dollar.

Experience, he said, is critical, noting his six years serving as a municipal councillor, his work on the Joint Council Committee overseeing the Central York Fire Services, Aurora's Environmental Advisory Committee, Trails and Active Transportation Committee, serving as Aurora's representative on the Wells Street School Accommodation Review Committee, a time as president of the Bayview Wellington Ratepayers' Association, the St. Jerome Catholic School Parent Council, and as a member of various local sports clubs.

"Residents have told me they want a collaborative, inclusive mayor who involves and engages people, a mayor who is not authoritarian, controlling or dismissive. Aurorans want a mayor who enforces accountability and welcomes transparency. Residents deserve a new way of governing and leading Aurora and I am that leader."

In Mr. Dawe's view, when Aurorans went to the polls in 2010, they voted overwhelmingly for "positive change" and that is what he delivered. To underscore his point, Mr. Dawe cited Aurora's high ranking in a survey from MoneySense Magazine which named Aurora the best place to live in York Region, and one of the best in Canada. This was bolstered by the recent announcement Aurora made the list of Remax's Top 100 Neighbourhoods list.

In addition, he added Aurora's Strategic Plan provides a clear framework to 2031, but looking ahead to the future that far ahead can only be so beneficial.

"It is clear that under my leadership our community has flourished," said Mr. Dawe. "More and more people want to live here, work here, and to play here. At the start of this term, Council asked residents to imagine Aurora in 2031. Then, in 2012, with the input of our community, Council released the Town of Aurora Strategic Plan – your vision for Aurora in 2031. I worked hard to deliver on the key objectives of that citizen's plan. As your mayor, I met with many of you in your homes, your business, your community groups, your sports organizations, and I heard the message loud and clear: You may have a vision for the future, but your needs are now. You want to know what your mayor will do for you today, not 20 years from now. You can be assured that, as your mayor, I will continue to make sound decisions for the benefit of all residents."

Speaking to his credentials, Mr. Dawe cited work done to renegotiate Aurora's Cultural Services Agreement with the Aurora Cultural Centre, trails creation, taking Minto Developments to court over extensive vacant land on Mavrinac Boulevard residents want preserved as green space, and collaboration with other municipalities within York Region to bring projects and initiatives in at a better place.

"I've worked to bring a hotel and conference centre to Aurora," he added. "The Stronach Group has confirmed they will be bringing forward an application for one in the next year; solid proof that we are creating an environment where businesses want to invest, but there is more work to be done. That is why I am seeking re-election to continue building upon the work we have accomplished together over the next four years."

Priorities within that time, he added, include a "bold transformation" of Aurora's Downtown Core, making a decision on Library Square, and new sports facilities, and an "aggressive" approach to seeking out new businesses for Aurora.

"After four years of stability, after four years of positive growth, we are faced with a choice: do we want to continue to build Aurora, to continue to create an environment where Aurora is the best place to live in York Region, and one of the best in Canada? I believe we do."