

VOTE 2014: Aurora needs to establish long-term vision for development, seniors and youth, says Council candidate Plamondon



By Brock Weir

When Tom Plamondon moved to Ontario from Pointe Claire, QC, in 1994 with his family in tow, he was looking for a place where his kids could continue with their French education.

On the recommendation of his sister, Sue, they looked into Lester B. Pearson Public School, enrolled their kids, and the rest is history.

At that time, Aurora and Pointe Claire were relatively similar in terms of size and growth and over the last 20 years, Mr. Plamondon says he has watched this growth locally with great interest.

It was a natural interest for Mr. Plamondon, who spent over 22 years as a planning director of the Quebec municipality, as well as serving as director of economic development and after watching with a vested interest, he now wants to be an active voice at the table as Aurora rapidly approaches build-out.

Earlier this summer he registered as a Council candidate for the October 27 municipal election. He says he hopes to be able to bring the skills gleaned from his career in city planning and economic development, skills he puts to good use today as a planning consultant for numerous municipal projects, to the table, with a goal to establishing a long-term vision for Aurora.

"When I look at the growth that has occurred in Aurora over the last 20-plus years, and understanding what the Province has been, the direction it has taken in establishing growth communities, and the establishment of the greenbelt and protection of the Oak Ridges Moraine, it has raised the importance of planning, particularly for areas like Aurora and Newmarket," he says. "We see the community has actually accelerated in growth. Most members of Council tend to look at the community's needs in the immediacy and not look down the road. I find myself looking even further. The time projections I am used to looking at are 30 or 40 years. Managing the growth of Aurora is one thing, but I think also understanding the cultural diversity of the community is becoming increasingly important."

As Aurora physically grows outward, and as its citizens follow suit, challenges inevitably lie ahead, he says. Case in point are the aging baby boomers. As this significant demographic ages, more thought will have to be put in to how community facilities can serve the whole population, particularly a greying one.

?The bulge [of seniors] is moving up, they tend to be healthier, they tend to be more active, and I think the facilities in the community need to reflect what their needs are,? he says, noting the community in turn can't risk losing sight of Aurora's youth. ?Although we always talk about our focus on the youth and opportunities for them, I think there needs to be a greater sensitivity around what that really means. I think it means we need to understand the implications technology, for example, is having on youth and making sure that every opportunity [is encompassed and embraced] because it is changing so quickly. We also need to focus on a greater sense of involvement in the community. I don't see many opportunities for youth to really express what it is they are looking for in the community directly to members of Council and that is where I think my campaign is going to focus.?

In the weeks leading up to the October election, Mr. Plamondon says he will be keeping his ears open to the voice of the community in determining how it can be best represented at the Council table. That is a responsibility he believes every Councillor should take to heart.

Being able to hear the views of the community will be particularly important, he adds, as the community reaches that all-important build- out stage where focus will have to shift away from development towards redevelopment and intensification.

?If you look at [recent recommendations to Council on the Aurora Promenade], consultants looked at five and 10 year time horizons, looking at intensification, redevelopment opportunities, and they are looking at ways to make it more vibrant, attractive and safer. Those then become very key focal points. In my experience as a planning director, working in a 300-year-old village, and looking at the protection of heritage and the viability of the business community, many of them struggle. How to stimulate and bring in the right mix of new businesses that help support existing business communities is very important and there I believe I can talk about making a difference.

?I am committed to making sure the voice of the community is heard at Council and that Council has a long-term view of the community and the direction in which it is going.?