

VOTE 2014: Aurora needs to keep pace with other municipalities, says candidate Bob Chapman



By Brock Weir

After more than three decades working in municipal finance, Bob Chapman just can't stay away in his retirement.

The 55-year-old Aurora resident has thrown his hat in the ring as a Council candidate in the October 27 municipal election.

With an eye on maintaining and improving Aurora's recreational spaces ? both indoor and outdoor ? and making things easier for the average commuter, Mr. Chapman says he was inspired to get involved in the community he has called home for 24 years through a letter he found written by his grandfather.

?He was a history teacher and he said that being a good citizen is important,? says Mr. Chapman. ?You might never invent something great, you might never become a billionaire or Prime Minister, but being a good citizen is something to strive for.

?I have always encouraged my kids to vote and get involved. This is something I see myself doing in contributing to the Town. I realise the value of these positions. Decision making is important, the Town is very well-run, but there are always things you can contribute as a politician.?

As a long-time commuter during the nearly quarter-century he has called Aurora home, Mr. Chapman says ensuring growth is ?handled nicely? is one of the biggest challenges Aurora is going to have to face over the next few years.

?The 404 and the GO Train are just really holding back Aurora,? he says. ?You can't get downtown to work on the 404. With the GO, I was glad to hear they are putting more trains on each way, and that will really help people stay downtown. I remember running to the GO Trains at 6.10 and not being able to stay [in Toronto] for things and hopefully GO Train service will improve for Aurora.?

But, as Go Transit, Metrolinx, and the 400-series highways are Provincial matters, some might question how this relates to municipal government. The answer, he says, is there will be increasing pressures ? both positive and negative ? for municipalities and all levels of government to work together over the coming decades, and much of this can be attributed to those growth challenges.

?There is the potential of amalgamation with Newmarket and York Region, so I think Aurora should continue to work on an integrated system with other municipalities,? says Mr. Chapman, noting he sees amalgamation as both a positive and an inevitability.

‘It saves money and it ensures uniform services. That is why a municipality has to be in sync with the other municipalities because, as we saw with the amalgamation of the City of Toronto, it is important for municipalities to be in sync with their debts, with their reserves, and the service levels they are providing.’

Service levels are not just limited to roads and sewers but, in Mr. Chapman's view, primarily to soccer fields and ice rinks, which people interact with every day. They are one of the key things that ‘makes the Town nice’, but there are areas around Aurora that are lacking in this regard.

‘We could have more resources devoted to recreation facilities and things in a manner that people use,’ he says. ‘Not everybody is going to use the soccer field, not everybody is going to use the swimming pool, so you do have to be practical about allocating resources and that is one of the major decisions that Councillors make.’

‘I think the budget needs to be kept tight for the sake of taxpayers and when you get a slightly tighter budget then the priorities become a bit more clear. When money is tight, people put money where it is a priority.’

Through his municipal finance background, Mr. Chapman says it is important to perform a ‘fair bit of due diligence’ when it comes to big ticket items like the recently approved Joint Operations Centre, as well as everything that might be incorporated into Queen's Diamond Jubilee Park in the future.

Although he says this Council has been pretty well run compared to the ‘dysfunctional Council a few years ago’, one thing he says this Council has lacked is a solid vision.

‘I don't think they had any major decisions to make and they didn't go crazy,’ he said. ‘From a management standpoint, did they do a great job in managing? I think they could do a little bit better in terms of giant vision projects. I don't think they are taking on too many.’