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THE AURORAN

Aurora's Community Newspaper

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COUNTRY FEVER

Hundreds of country music fans flocked to Yonge Street for the Town's annual Saturday Night Fever event on September 12, this time presented with a country twist. A popular attraction was New Age Country, which offered on-street line-dancing lessons, in between sets on the nearby stage which included (INSET) Whiskey Glasses, The Ultimate Garth Brooks Experience, and the Country Thunder Show. For more, see Page 11.

Auroran photo by Glenn Rodger

Resources, training factors in Heiniu incident: report finds

Not enough evidence to determine cause of death

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Resources and training were among the factors considered in the death of Heiniu, an East Gwillimbury rottweiler that died during an incident involving Aurora animal control officers, but a conclusive cause of death could not be determined, according to a report released by the Town of Aurora.

An independent municipal review carried out by Canine Foundations was released by the Town on Tuesday, September 15.

While the report outlined a number of resource- and training-related factors that led to the escalation of the incident, it was unable to determine the precise cause of the dog's death due to a lack of evidence.

"The Town initiated discussions regarding an independent review shortly after the incident. The review did not commence immediately after the retainer of the review team due, in part, to the availability and pre-existing professional commitments of the multidisciplinary review team," reads the 362-page report. "As the review was retrospective in nature and was not intended to constitute a contemporaneous scene investigation, the original scene had not been preserved for later examination and certain transient

Continued on page 9

Summer storm recovery sees shift from tree protection plan

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

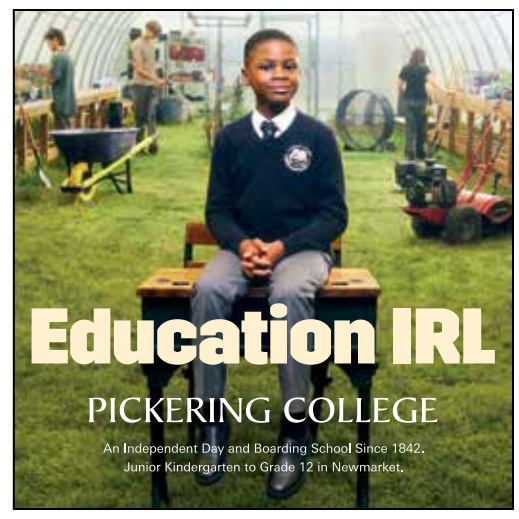
A municipal program treating local ash trees against the invasive Emerald Ash Borer beetle is set to move to the backburner as the Town focuses on recovery following a July microburst that caused extensive damage in Aurora's northwest.

Continued on page 6

MONTH OF CULTURE

Aurora's Month of Culture is now underway, and among the events kicking off the program was the Tabriz Ensemble, representing music and dance of Azerbaijan, hosted by the Aurora Public Library on Saturday afternoon. For more, see Page 10.

Auroran photo by Glenn Rodger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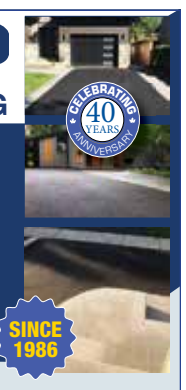

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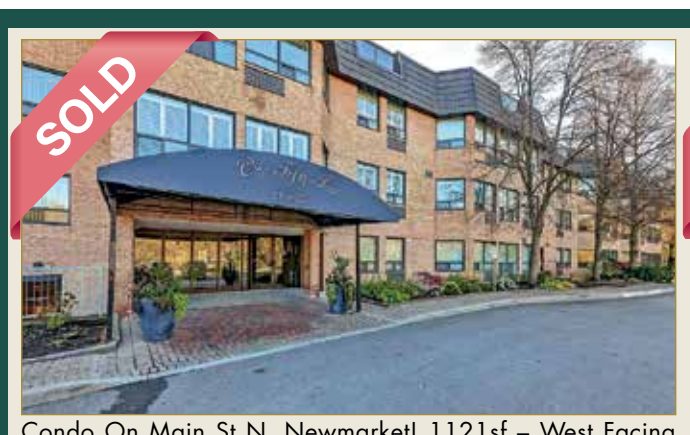
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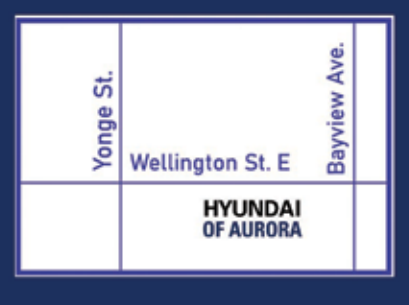

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Sports groups taking a financial hit with School Board permits

Escalating costs of gym rentals could force clubs to re-think local presence

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Sports groups like Storm Volleyball may need to re-think how they operate in Aurora and beyond after being faced with increasing facility rental fees from the York Region District School Board (YRDSB).

Aurora is set to advocate for reduced fees and revised fee structures from the YRDSB following a motion from Ward 1 Councillor Ron Weese – and an impassioned plea from representatives from Storm Volleyball – at last week's Committee of the Whole meeting.

The motion, which was approved on September 8, and will be up for final ratification by Council on September 22, calls on the Town to ask the YRDSB for a review on its most recent permit fee structure "with particular consideration given to its impact on not-for-profit community sport organizations and the affordability of children's and youth sport programming."

The motion requests the YRDSB to consult with impacted municipalities and not-for-profits and restore the fee structure in place prior to the most recent update or "establish a dedicated municipal/non-profit community-sport rental rate that provides affordable access to school gymnasiums for eligible not-for-profit organizations delivering children's and youth sport programming."

Further consideration should also be given to "programs serving children and youth with disabilities, including consideration of reduced or subsidized facility rental rates where appropriate, recognizing the additional costs frequently associated with accessible and adaptive sport programming."

"The York Region District School Board has implemented unprecedented increases in school permit fees with very little warning," said Kathie Sharkey of Storm Volleyball, who delegated to last week's Committee meeting on behalf of Storm and "all other groups and families across York Region that are facing the challenge to deal with the massive increases in school permits."

"The media statement that [the Board has] released indicates that they have gradually been increasing their rates since last year, but you'll see from the table that it's not gradual. If you look year to year, you'll see that this year the numbers… are egregious. They're huge numbers, and they've increased a large amount," she continued. "We understand that the Board's goal toward a cost recovery model, but the reality is that everyone is potentially being priced out because the cost is not being phased in a timely manner. Organizations and families need time to budget for planned increases. Public school gymnasiums are funded by taxpayers and are community assets. They should be a low cost to community organizations, especially not-for-profit organizations."

In addition to the fee increases, Sharkey noted the Board is also stepping back from reducing the amount of equipment they make available to permit holders – volleyball nets in the case of Storm, for instance – and these changes are causing significant hardship for clubs.

"One high school that we host tournaments at, the facility fee has gone up 338 per cent per hour, just as an example," Sharkey shared. "A typical athlete last year paid about $3,800 for the season, and this season it could be $4,500 or more, which doesn't include other travel fees and team fees that are incurred in a season, and we have to cut as much permit time as possible because we've had no choice so that we can keep fees low.

"If we didn't make any adjustments, each athlete would have been paying $6,500 this year, which is a $2,700 increase. A volunteer run program only has two options: raise fees, which excludes lower income families, or shut down the program entirely. Long established programs are giving up their permits, closing down because they can no longer afford the space. The biggest loss is to our youth and athletes will lose the opportunities to play sports and participate in activities. If a family can't afford this increase of membership fees, and because of the high permit costs, their child simply won't play, and what if they have more than one child? We ask the Council and the Province to take immediate action to force the Board to reduce the increase to a reasonable rate, giving everyone time to find a better resolution."

Sharkey, on Storm's behalf, called on Council to work jointly with other municipalities to lobby the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Sport to alleviate the situation, so "local boards aren't forced to choose between classroom resources and community health, and establish permanent a permanent affordability framework that evaluates permit fees based on community benefit, youth participation, and the not-for-profit status of the provider."

Support from Council was clear, both from the passage of Councillor Weese's motion and in the comments made around the table.

"I think now it's upon us with what influence we have to rally the Province and the School Board to see if they can bring us back to as close to where we were before to helping our community members," said Ward 6 Councillor Harold Kim, who said other sports groups and impacted parents had reached out to him on the same issue.

Speaking to his motion, Councillor Weese said it was a matter of not only improving the situation for impacted groups, but for Council to show they recognize the value these clubs bring to the community.

"We understand what the impact is when an external body takes one of those line items that's significant and suddenly drops it into an expense that is unbudgeted," said Weese. "Many of these organizations do not run in large reserves, so basically they get into a panic and, at the end of the day, we know that when costs rise families suffer from an affordability standpoint and, in many cases, people drop out of sport and that's not the intention of this Council – and I hope it is not the intention of the School Board.

"The other issue that is important here is that this is not just an Aurora issue, this is a York Region issue because it's the York Region District School Board. I think it's a wider issue, which is why [the motion] goes to the Minister of Education and the Premier, as well as all the other municipalities in York Region. I hope everybody will take a look at the work that is done by sport organizations and by our Town who's affected by this and will approve the motion so that we can have a letter written that will express our concerns and also offer some help on working collaboratively with people so that we could phase this in over a period of time so it seems sustainable for both groups."

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Region marks 25th anniversary of 9/11

This year marks 25 years since the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. Today, we honour the nearly 3,000 innocent lives lost and recognize the National Day of Service, a day to turn grief into purpose and action.

York Regional Council and The Regional Municipality of York will forever remember the thousands of lives taken too soon and the families and communities that changed forever. The memories of that day continue to shape how we understand courage, compassion and the care we show for one another.

The National Day of Service honours victims and those who responded by keeping their spirits alive through acts of giving back. This day encourages people to step outside their routine and take part in a charitable service, a small act of kindness or meaningful community engagement. Each gesture, no matter how simple, becomes part of a larger story of hope and humanity.

This day also serves as a reminder of resilience. It reflects the strength shown by first responders whose heroic actions saved lives and inspired the world around them. To them, and to the first responders who serve in our communities today, we offer our deepest thanks for your commitment and sacrifice.

In the face of unimaginable loss, people reached for one another. Strangers became neighbours who offered comfort, a sense of belonging and reminded each other that togetherness steadies us even in our hardest moments.

Moments of tragedy often bring people together, yet the deeper lesson is this connection should not be reserved for difficult times. Communities grow stronger when support is steady, when kindness is part of everyday life and when we choose to look out for one another long before we are tested. In Canada, and here in York Region, this day reaffirms our commitment to belonging, unity and the belief we are stronger together.

On behalf of Regional Council and more than 1.3 million people who call our communities home, we remember the lives lost, we honour the heroes who stepped forward and we commit ourselves to service that supports our community.

Eric Jolliffe
York Region Chairman and CEO

Additional candidate responses

Last week, The Auroran published the first two of its series of questions with Council Candidates on the municipal ballot this October 26.

A few responses were received shortly after The Auroran went to press last week, which were included online, and now shared in print here.

Question 1: *Given Canada's trade dispute with the United States, what's the single biggest thing/ way a Council can do at the municipal level, in your view, to protect the interests of local businesses that rely on cross-border trade and the locally-based employees who rely on the jobs they provide?*

ANSWERS:

NIKKI ALBER, Candidate Ward 3 – "While municipalities cannot control international tariffs, there are two meaningful actions we can take to support local business owners and the employees whose jobs depend on them. First, the Town can clearly communicate what provincial and federal relief programs are available and help affected businesses successfully navigate the application process. It is not enough to simply provide a list of resources—we should help connect business owners with the right programs and ensure they can access the support available to them. Second, we can

Continued on page 23

Machell's Corners

Torchbearers

BROCK'S BANTER

Brock Weir

It started off as a day almost like any other – aside from having to put a bit more attention into our outward appearances before we set off.

It was picture day at Newmarket High School and, as is the case with high school students of just about every generation, appearances were probably emphasized more than they should have been.

Even if we had no interest in buying a package of the resulting 8x10s and wallet-size numbers for parents, grandparents, and anyone else our egos might have told us would be interested in receiving a little piece of ourselves, they were images we had to live with for the rest of the year, whether we liked it or not. Our student cards were ubiquitous at the time, so you didn't want to look like you'd been pulled out of the drainpipe and stuck in front of the camera against your will – so, you persevered.

Getting the look just right seemed important at the time. The previous year, my own "look" was something of an afterthought. Unbeknownst to me, the rather raggedy blue, buttoned pullover had a paint splatter on the sleeve, the result of trying to corral my dog amid home renovations earlier in the day.

I had to live with that photo for the entire year and, to add insult to injury, the photo was inexplicably repeated twice in that year's yearbook.

I wasn't about to let that happen again, so I made sure everything was just right – double checking that not a single wrinkle could be found in the olive-green button-up I chose for the day.

I was looking pretty good in terms of a year-over-year comparison, but as important as appearances seemed then, all that was quickly tossed to the side as a triviality.

That year's picture day happened to fall on September 11, 2001, and that Grade 10 picture remains for me a tangible reminder not only of those "you remember where you were when" moments, but also a reminder of how quickly the state of our world can turn on a dime.

Outside of the wardrobe woes, the day started pretty much unlike any other.

It was clear before too long, however, that something had shifted.

We were about 20 minutes into our homeroom class that morning when another teacher came into the room and pulled ours aside for a huddle. As the whispers started, our teacher's face seemed to turn ashen and the quieter the whispers got, the more intense the conversation seemed to be.

Nobody said anything after the huddle had concluded and the other teacher went back to her own classroom, but it was clear something had happened.

No further information was immediately forthcoming, and with the benefit of hindsight I can only imagine our teachers were waiting for further instructions from their superiors on how to tell us what happened, how to answer any follow-up questions we may have had, and have the proper resources lined up for anyone who may have needed it.

This was long before the vast majority of us had devices in our pockets that can connect us instantly to everyone, anyone around the world. Those of us who were still a year or two away from getting a rudimentary flip phone to call our very own were left with just two options, both of which were Bell payphones in our school's atrium.

At my first available moment after second period, I dug around in my backpack for a quarter and called my mom at work for any information on why everyone was acting so strangely. Her thorough explanation of what was known up until that point was both enlightening, incomprehensible and, in a word, terrifying.

It was about an hour or so later when teachers finally shared the news with us and televisions where wheeled into the library so we could see, for better or worse, the aftermath of such a terrible and traumatic moment in our collective history unfold in real time.

Memories of the day are still as potent with me as they were in 2001 and watching ceremonies on Friday morning commemorating the 25th anniversary of 9/11 brought up a lot of emotions. Amid those emotions, however, I wondered how potent these ceremonies and observances may have been for those born within the last quarter-century compared to those of us who lived through the aftermath.

Unless they had a family member who lost a loved one that day, was it just a ceremony commemorating just one more in a long line of tragedies that have befallen our world? Was it an anniversary of an event that might seem as remote to them as events related to the Second World War, for instance, may have seemed to our generation? Or did it mean something else entirely to them?

It was an odd realization that my generation – broadly speaking, of course – will be the last to have living memories of the day, as well as of how different our world was on September 10 of that year.

We are seeing with increased frequency these days how easy it is to repeat the mistakes of our past when there are few people left to share their memories of what happened when the mistake was made the first time around.

Those of us in this line of work are fortunate enough to meet people every day who trust in us to share their stories. From my perspective, it has always been a particular honour to share the stories our veterans have so generously shared with us.

As our Second World War veterans continue to pass into history one by one, they are to be commended not only for their work serving King and Country but finding the power within themselves to share their experiences, often memories that lost no difficulty in reliving through the passage of time, to ensure that what they fought for – and against – is not forgotten.

As their numbers dwindle and we see global affairs unfold as they are, I'm sadly not sure we can say that with confidence anymore.

It's now incumbent upon us to carry their torch and be their legacy keepers.

In some respects, however, we already do that more than we realize.

This Sunday, Terry Fox Runs will take place in countless communities across the country, not only raising money for cancer research, but carrying on the legacy of Terry Fox, whose iconic Marathon of Hope continues to capture the public's imagination more than 46 years before he set off on his mission.

He may not have been able to complete the mission himself, but, collectively, Canadians have completed it several times over in his name, whether they witnessed him run through their communities firsthand all those many years ago, heard these memories second-hand from parents or grandparents, or learned about him through any number of school events that also keep his legacy alive.

His is a legacy we continue to learn from – and because we make a concerted effort to do so.

Our veterans' legacies have been immortalized for us to learn from.

Some things are too important to let them be forgotten.

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AURORA MUSEUM & ARCHIVES

HISTORY THRIVES ON PAGE 5 WITH THE AURORA MUSEUM & ARCHIVES

SOME FACTS ON THE RECORD

AWESOME ARTIFACT ALERT

While this recording format is making a comeback, there is more to this example than meets the eye. Nowadays, we often call records just "vinyl," but that specific polymer was not yet sufficiently developed for real-world use until at least 1931. This record, made by the RCA Victor company (2016.28.6c), features part 3 of Ravel's Bolero, and was pressed about 1930. Rather than vinyl, this record is made of a thick layer of shellac which encases a steel core. The grooves on these 78RPM records are substantially wider than those from the vinyl era, and would necessitate a much larger needle than the styli we know today. The ornate leather-bound book in which these records were kept (or sold in the case of sets) was known as an album – akin to a photograph or scrap album from the time – a name that has persisted through the decades to refer to a musical release.

Back in the day, even folks who listened to Ravel were groovy!

COSTAS' CORNER

MP Costas Menegakis
Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill

Canada needs an economic strategy that strengthens our economy, protects our sovereignty and puts Canadians first.

For families across our community, the state of the economy is not an abstract debate. It is the price of groceries at the checkout, the cost of rent, the size of a mortgage payment and whether a family can afford to keep up with the rising cost of everyday life.

After years of rising costs, Canadians need more than assurances that relief is around the corner. They need a government focused on making life more affordable and making Canada more competitive.

Conservative Party Leader Pierre Poilievre is right to make the case directly to Americans for the importance of free trade with Canada. Our two countries have built an economic relationship that supports businesses, workers and families on both sides of the border. That relationship matters.

But Canada's economic future cannot depend on looking outward while failing to address the barriers holding Canadians back at home. The answer starts with making Canada more affordable and more competitive.

That means taking practical steps to lower costs for families and businesses. Conservatives have proposed scrapping gas taxes, removing the GST from Canadian-made automobiles and ending the industrial carbon tax.

It also means making it easier to invest and build in Canada. That includes allowing Canadians to reinvest capital gains back into our economy without being taxed on that reinvestment, removing federal barriers to responsible development and getting projects that have been waiting for federal approval moving forward.

Canada should be a place where businesses want to invest, workers can find good jobs and families can afford to build a future.

We also need to remove the barriers that prevent Canadians from doing business with one another. A Canadian company should not face unnecessary obstacles simply because it wants to sell its products in another province. If we cannot freely trade with each other from coast to coast, we are leaving economic growth on the table.

Canada has enormous economic advantages. We have energy, critical minerals, agriculture, manufacturing, technology, skilled workers and entrepreneurs. Yet we continue to face high costs, weak productivity and barriers that make it harder to build and invest.

The government should be making it easier to build homes, develop our resources, attract investment and grow Canadian businesses. Instead of adding more costs and red tape, we should be removing them.

Strengthening Canada's sovereignty starts with strengthening our ability to succeed on our own terms. That means using our resources, connecting our markets, supporting Canadian businesses and creating an environment where people can afford to live, work and build a future.

International trade will always be important. Canada should continue to diversify its markets and build strong relationships with partners around the world. But trade policy must ultimately serve Canadians. It cannot be a substitute for fixing the problems we face at home.

For families in Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill, the priority is straightforward: affordable homes, affordable groceries, good jobs and an economy where hard work gets people ahead.

Canada has the resources, talent and determination to succeed. What Canadians need now is a government prepared to act: to lower costs, remove barriers, unlock investment and get Canada building again.

That is how we strengthen our economy. That is how we protect our sovereignty. And that is how we put Canadians first.

INSIDE AURORA

Scott Johnston

SEASONAL SLIDE

Perhaps it's only my perspective, but somehow time on the calendar seems to move a little faster this time of year.

It's fully summer, for example, and then suddenly the signs that it's winding down start accelerating towards us … Concerts in the Park come to a close, the end of the Ex, kids back to school, days getting shorter, nights getting cooler.

Before you know it, and we're already well past this point, it's apparent that the leaves are starting to change.

It's hard to enjoy the new season though, as like the downhill part of a roller coaster, things keep accelerating as we go through September, crossing off special events (Saturday Night Fever on Yonge, the Multicultural Festival, Doors Open, Truth and Reconciliation Day activities) seemingly every few days.

Before you know it, you're hastily swigging down your pumpkin spiced drink and realizing that Thanksgiving is looming, there are only a few weeks left for the Farmers' Market, and you should buy some mums for the porch before it gets too cold.

We all love autumn, and as the days get cooler and shorter through October, you'll want to pause and soak in all the sights, sounds, smells and colours. Sadly, you'll be too busy with Thanksgiving plans, rushing to clean up your garden, and finding time to get your fall and Halloween decorations out.

As if there wasn't enough on our plates already, through the next two months we also have to try to find time to try to absorb the key points associated with the municipal election. What are the issues? Who's promising to do what? How do the candidates' platforms differ? Does it all make sense? Have I blocked off time to vote? And what ward am I in?

Then, before you can take a breath to recover from the election, it's Halloween.

Of course, the day after Halloween, the Christmas season will start, with store displays, ads, and other festive reminders blitzing you at every turn.

There's barely enough time to pack up the Halloween stuff, rake the leaves, put away the patio furniture, dig out the winter clothing, figure out when to put on the winter snow tires, and reset all the clocks following daylight savings.

Oh, and hopefully squeeze in a few minutes on November 11 to honour Remembrance Day.

By then the Santa Under the Stars parade will be upon us, and the holiday madness will be in full swing … parties, shopping, relatives, decorating, school concerts, wrapping…

While it will be about six weeks until Christmas, and far less to Hanukkah, by this stage the days on the calendar are whipping by, and even with the best of planning there will never be enough time to get everything done that you planned to do.

As for having a spare moment to enjoy it all, good luck! The miracle of the holiday season is not personal hope and goodwill, it's having the time to calmly step back and appreciate it.

But once we get through Christmas and New Year's, the roller coaster that is the calendar will have bottomed out and will be on its way back up again. And you know how quickly a roller coaster moves uphill? Yes, very slowly.

Which explains why the passing of the days on the calendar seems to drag so slowly in winter, and it takes so long to get through January and February.

For now, enjoy the ride, Aurora.

Feel free to e-mail Scott at:
machellscorners@gmail.com

Time Travellers Diary

By Jacqueline Stuart

Gone far afield?

As is widely known, for several decades our crossroads community's unofficial name was "Machell's Corners," named for the man, Richard Machell, who had a general store at the south-east corner of Yonge and Wellington.

Around 1850, Mr. Machell, by then a widower, married Martha Ann Field, a widow. The 1851 census shows the family consisting of 56-year-old Richard; his considerably younger wife, aged 37; two teenage Machell daughters; and Martha's eleven-year-old son, John Field.

In about 1860, John Field, in his very early twenties, took on an important role, perhaps even full partnership, in his stepfather's general store business. Advertisements for "Machell, Field & Co." began appearing in local newspapers. The advertisements tended to stress the low prices to be found in the store. In fact, not just low prices but downright "cheap."

John Field took on another important position in 1860: he married. His wife, Isabella Atkinson, was of Irish birth. And in 1861 John purchased from his stepfather a piece of land at the west corner of Wellington and the Wells Street northern extension. The young couple began raising their family of a son and two daughters in the fine house which stands there still.

Mr. Field took an active part in village life. He was elected to the village Council in 1867 and 1868, for example. Some other positions he held were a bit less demanding while still serving the community. He was the treasurer of the committee which organized a very grand Victoria Day celebration in 1863, for instance. In 1878 he was elected president of the Aurora Cricket Club.

And then it all fell apart.

Following Richard Machell's death in 1868, John Field was in sole charge of the general store. Perhaps that emphasis on the low prices was not such a good idea. For whatever reason, the business failed in May of 1881. John Field disappeared.

In the 1881 census, taken about the same time, he was supposedly living in Aurora with his mother, Martha Machell. (The grand house on Wellington had been sold in 1876, perhaps a hint of things to come.) Isabella and their children were not included; they would later appear in Toronto directories and census returns.

Did I really want to take a trip back to see something of this man's life? I gritted my teeth, fired up the time travel machine, and went back to the spring of 1881. There were notices announcing the "closing sale" in the windows of the store. Had the young man behind the counter been hired by Mrs. Machell to look after the closure, or was he the last Field employee, and perhaps unpaid? It was too depressing: I came back to the present.

This diarist has been able to find only one mention of John Field in the years following the business collapse. In 1907, a transaction concerning a property owned by his mother (who had died in 1889) involved John Field, but was looked after by his representative, Isabella Field. Apparently they were still able to communicate – unless Isabella just stepped in to clear things up.

I can offer no tidy end to this story of a man who seemed to have such a satisfactory, if unexciting, life available to him.

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Summer storm recovery sees shift from tree protection plan

From page 1

In a report received by Council at last week's Committee of the Whole meeting, Matthew Volpintesta, Aurora's Manager of Parks and Fleet, said ash trees accounted for 52 per cent of the total street tree population felled in the storm. The program to treat the trees against the beetles has been "paused" for the remainder of the year until a fulsome review of its progress can take place by early 2027.

"The storm on July 3, 2026, at approximately 2.45 p.m. was a brief, but intense, storm cell impacting residential properties, private institutional properties, and most significantly, Town-owned boulevards and parkland," said Volpintesta in his report to Council. "Aurora's urban forest was severely impacted with hundreds of trees sustaining major damage. Damage to power infrastructure and public utility was also significant."

The report said the municipal response to the storm was "swift" among staff and contractors alike, joining first responders in ensuring "immediate hazards were mitigated and emergency vehicles could easily access the affected areas."

"As the hours passed, it became clear that the storm had impacted hundreds of trees within a very localized area both on public and private lands; however, the full extent would not be known for days," said Volpintesta. "Damage ranged from broken tree limbs to complete tree failure with significant sized trees entirely uprooted. The Town's communications teams were quick to provide essential information through coordinated update on storms and response efforts.

"Recovery efforts during the first couple of weeks were complicated by the widespread impact to both municipal and private trees, requiring coordination between Town crews, contractors, and property owners. Adding to the complexity of the response were the numerous private arborists and insurance contractors working to remove the non-municipal trees that had fallen on private property, making for a somewhat chaotic scene."

The report notes that the Lakeview/Willow Farm trail system and adjacent areas in the southwest quadrant of Yonge Street and St. John's Sideroad was the most heavily impacted location within Aurora, with a full assessment taking place in the last week of July.

"The Town received 236 resident reports related to storm damage," the report continues. "Approximately 107 municipal trees along public boulevards were completely lost and will require replacing, while many others required level 1 or 2 tree risk assessments to determine whether they could be safely retained through pruning. Staff estimate approximately 1,000-plus trees ranging in size were lost within parks, trails, and woodlots. It was not only Town lands that suffered canopy loss, but many residential properties were also significantly impacted with some losing more than half of the trees on private property and others losing almost all trees. Due to the size of the lots within the impact zone of the storm, a couple of these residential properties lost upwards of 30 trees. Staff estimate over 100 trees on private residential lands failed or were uprooted requiring removal."

Volpintesta's report states the road to full recovery is "extensive and will take several years to fully re-stablish the loss within the urban tree canopy." Replanting efforts in parklands will begin in 2028, he notes.

As Council reviewed the report at the Committee level last week, they said the storm was a big hit to the Town's tree canopy, with Sara Tienkamp, Aurora's Director of Operational Services, stating it could take between 30 and 50 years to regain the canopy cover and carbon sink properties the lost trees brought to the community.

"It's really sad to hear all that because [the age of the trees] really does matter," said Ward 2 Councillor Rachel Gilliland. "I'm just glad at least we have this report in place and we have a strategy so at least we can make some improvements."

Councillor Gilliland also welcomed the update on the Emerald Ash Borer, and Tienkamp said the storm was an "eye-opener" that the course of treatment being followed by the Town wasn't "as viable or successful as we would have hoped."

Funding otherwise allocated to treatment, she added, could now be redirected to recovery and replanting.

"It's going to be quite an impact on this year's budget and allow us the time to really do some investigation, some analysis on treatments, and reach out to some of our peers and see whether it's maybe time to turn our heads to maybe a replacement program," said Tienkamp. "Maybe it's a removal and replacement program and we look towards other species that are going to be more viable because these trees have been structurally impacted by the Borer. It eats into the heartwood, the integrity of the tree does start to degrade, and I think that's what we saw in this storm."

Pausing the Emerald Ash Borer treatments will free up municipal funds to focus on replanting, but Mayor Tom Mrakas and staff alike indicated there would soon be further funding available to aid in the effort, while Ward 3 Councillor Wendy Gaertner said situations like these were exactly why the Town has a Tax Rate Stabilization Reserve – to mitigate recovery in the here and now without impacting the cost to taxpayers.

"It came in quick, it finished quick, but what it left behind was absolutely destructive," said Mayor Mrakas. "I remember leaving my house and…you couldn't even drive through the neighbourhood. You had to get out and walk and everyone was walking and we were all talking and the crews were on site immediately. It was incredible to see everyone get out there. Everyone was pitching in. Everyone was helping. I want to thank the entire team for all the work that they did, and I can tell you all the residents in the area appreciate the work that they did as well."

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Cannabis stores could be subject to increased monitoring following Committee recommendations

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Local cannabis retail stores could be subject to increased monitoring after lawmakers received a series of recommendations made by a citizen-led task force.

Council last week tentatively approved several recommendations made by members of the Town's Cannabis Retail Review Task Force.

The Task Force's recommendations include improved public information and reporting identifying where residents and businesses can report their concerns on cannabis retail; establish a "targeted response" approach to these concerns, engaging the retailer, property owners, neighbouring businesses, York Regional Police, and the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario (AGCO) where appropriate; and encourage cannabis retailers and property owners to "proactively address legitimate neighbourhood concerns, including litter, parking, property maintenance, and patron behaviour occurring on their properties."

The Task Force also called on the Town to reaffirm the municipality's position when it opted in on cannabis retail in 2019, calling for the authority enforce the location of cannabis retail with a minimum of 150-metres separating them from "sensitive uses" including daycares, nurseries, parks, group homes, addiction and counselling facilities, recreation facilities, and "other appropriate gathering spaces."

This separation has not been enforced locally by licensing authorities, Council and Task Force members agree, and the Task Force called on Council to request the Ontario Government "amend the cannabis retail regulatory framework to provide municipalities with meaningful authority to address the location, density, and clustering of cannabis retail stores within their communities."

In her report to Council, Town Solicitor Patricia De Sario said the Town does not have the authority to license private cannabis retail stores or prohibit them as a land use, but "private cannabis retail stores are required to comply with the Town's zoning bylaw and the Official Plan in regard to zones and standards that apply to all retail stores."

"As such, private cannabis retail stores may be located wherever retail uses are permitted and must comply with setbacks and other standards," she said. "Further, the Building Code and Fire Code may apply if permits are required and where these codes do apply, the appropriate inspections would be required."

While municipal authority might be limited, Council endorsed the Task Force's recommendations at last week's Committee of the Whole meeting, a decision expected to be ratified at the last scheduled meeting of this Council term on September 22.

"I want to…thank everyone on the Committee, both staff and public members for doing a great job in identifying and researching and understanding better the impact of cannabis retail stores in Aurora," said Ward 5 Councillor John Gallo, who chaired the Task Force. "I think we captured the issues, I think we identified the concerns, and we put forward some action items to [get in front of] any potential issues, and strategies on how to deal with them."

The recommendations were also supported by Ward 1 Councillor Ron Weese, who was an active participant on the Task Force as well.

"I'd like to thank the Legal Department for the work that they have done on helping pull all of this together, because it was a bit of a jigsaw puzzle at one point, but they did a fantastic job and I want to thank the people who are on the committee. We had people who are compliance officers with large cannabis organizations, we had residents, we had people from the YRP, we had people from our own Bylaw offices, both residents as well as commercial people. I think the job was done very well and I hope these recommendations are put into motion for us through this because I think it will make a difference."

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AURORA VOTES 2026

Mayoral candidates largely agree with findings of cannabis review, but will address concerns

BY BROCK WEIR
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LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Council this month could give the formal green light to a series of recommendations made by Aurora's Cannabis Review Task Force.

Local lawmakers reviewed the recommendations at the Committee level last week, with their recommendations up for final ratification at the final scheduled regular Council meeting of the 2022-2026 term on September 22.

This week, Aurora's Mayoral candidates were asked how they would assess Aurora's experience as an opt-in community on cannabis retail, and what they would do to address any concerns heard from residents and businesses.

Here's how they answered:

SHAWN DEANE – "I concur with the findings presented in the August 27, 2026 Council report, which stated that the Task Force 'did not find evidence that cannabis retailers generally represent a significant townwide public safety or enforcement problem.' The report also concluded that complaints were not consistent across locations and should therefore be addressed individually rather than through new, broad bylaws. I agree with this assessment. However, the report did not examine the positive economic contributions these retailers provide to the Town, including tax revenue and local employment. With neighbouring municipalities having opted out of permitting cannabis retail, Aurora will naturally continue to attract additional retailers as our population grows. A complete analysis should include both the operational impacts and the economic benefits associated with these businesses."

JOHN GALLO – "When Aurora opted into cannabis retail, Council established a framework intended to balance legal access with community concerns. Several years later, I felt it was time to examine how that framework was actually working, which is why I initiated the Cannabis Retail Review Task Force. The purpose was to listen to residents and businesses, review our experience since opting in, and determine whether improvements could be made. I also supported going directly to the community through a public survey so our decisions would be informed by residents' actual experiences. The concerns I've heard are less about whether cannabis should be legal and more about issues such as store locations, concentration, loitering and impacts on neighbouring businesses and residents. The challenge is that municipalities have limited authority because much of cannabis retail regulation rests with the Province and the AGCO. Where Aurora has the ability to act, we should. Where provincial rules limit us, we should advocate for greater municipal input. This review is about learning from our experience and making practical improvements. As Mayor, I would continue that approach: listen, gather evidence, address problems within our authority and advocate for change where the current provincial framework isn't working for our community."

TOM MRAKAS – "Aurora was one of the first municipalities in York Region to opt in to retail cannabis, back in 2019. As a result, we ended up absorbing a disproportionate share of stores relative to our size — well over a dozen in a town of roughly 66,000 people. That concentration is the concern I hear most from residents and businesses: too many storefronts clustered in some areas, and real questions about whether our market is actually saturated. Business owners are competing in an uneven playing field, and residents in the most affected neighbourhoods are frustrated by the sheer density of outlets. I support Council's push to have the Province and the AGCO stop accepting new cannabis retail applications for Aurora and to look seriously at a cap on the number of stores permitted. Going forward, I will keep pressing the Premier and the Minister for that cap, and keep listening closely to residents in the areas where store concentration is the biggest source of frustration."

YAFANG SHI – "Council commissioned a survey on cannabis stores in June 2025 and released the report in August 2026, near the end of the current Council's term. I wonder why the Council did not address this issue earlier. The Cannabis Retail Review Task Force's Final Findings and Recommendations report identified cannabis store location and concentration as key concerns. The Task Force recommended advocating for greater municipal authority over cannabis retail location, concentration, and neighbourhood compatibility. However, the outcome of such advocacy is not guaranteed to be favourable to local municipalities, nor is it clear whether or when legislative changes would occur. Under the current legislative framework, the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario (AGCO) has authority over the location and number of cannabis retail stores. The Town and residents have only a small window, 15 days, to respond to an application for a new cannabis store. To respond proactively to new applications, the Town and concerned residents should subscribe to the AGCO's online portal and monitor new applications. This would allow them to promptly submit public-interest concerns when a new application is filed."

Council candidates were asked the same question this week.

For their responses, please see Pages 20 and 21.

Resources, training factors in Heiniu incident: report finds

From page 1

physical and time-sensitive digital evidence was no longer available. These circumstances required the review team to rely primarily on contemporaneous documentation, photographs, video evidence, and other independent sources to reconstruct and assess the incident.

"The passage of time also reflected the review process itself. Evidence collection, site attendance, and other investigative activities occurred over an extended period as the review progressed and as additional information was obtained."

The report goes on to note that "several potentially significant sources of evidence," including a veterinary necropsy, were not provided by the dog owners. This file, the report said, "may have provided objective medical information regarding the dog's injuries and cause of death."

"Consistent with its retrospective mandate, the review was conducted through the systematic examination and corroboration of documentary records, interviews, physical inspections, photographs, video evidence, and independent witness accounts," the report finds. "These evidentiary limitations restricted the review's ability to independently examine the dog's injuries, determine the physiological mechanism associated with its deterioration, or establish a definitive cause of death.

"Further, photographic and video evidence available to the review was limited. The available photographs documented only portions of the dog's condition and from limited perspectives, reducing the review's ability to independently assess the location, extent, and progression of observable injuries and bleeding to correlate physical findings with witness accounts and the reported sequence of events.

"Accordingly, while the review was able to reach evidence-based conclusions regarding the behavioural, operational, organizational, and procedural aspects of the incident, the dog's precise psychological mechanism and cause of death could not be independently established from available evidence."

That said, outlining the factors that led to what they describe as Heiniu's "physical deterioration," the review cites "prolonged physical exertion, repeated unsuccessful loading attempts, and continued handling, limited evidence of substantial recovery periods between attempts, and unknown hydration status."

"During restraint, additional relevant factors included substantial physical resistance, the appearance of observable bleeding during dual catch pole restraint, and identified aspects of catch pole management that differed from the training the officers had received," the report continues. "The potential relevance of underlying medical conditions or interactions among these factors also cannot be excluded.

"The identified differences between catch pole management during the incident and the training the officers had received are relevant when assessing the manner in which the restraint equipment was managed. However, these differences do not, in themselves, establish that the manner of equipment use caused or contributed to the dog's subsequent loss of responsiveness. The temporal relationship between the dual catch pole restraint, the dog's physical resistance, the appearance of visible bleeding, and the subsequent deterioration is also relevant to the assessment; however, temporal association alone does not establish the mechanism or cause of the observed injury or subsequent deterioration.

"Accordingly, restraint-related injury remains a potential contributing factor that cannot be excluded; however, the available evidence does not permit the review to determine whether inappropriate catch pole management caused or materially contributed to the dog's subsequent loss of responsiveness. Nor can the available evidence reliably determine the relative contribution of the multiple factors identified through the incident. In the absence of contemporaneous veterinary assessment, an external veterinary post-mortem examination, or veterinary necropsy evidence, any more definitive conclusion regarding physiological causation would extend beyond what the available evidence can support."

Beyond evidence of Heiniu's condition, the report found that "limited steps" were undertaken by the officers in question to confirm the dog's condition after it ceased to move, and the report questioned an apparent lack of outlined precures for instances like these, suggesting Aurora's Animal Services Department does not have the needed resources to provide such services to East Gwillimbury and Georgina in addition to Aurora.

"The incident identified limitations in the availability of additional trained personnel and specialized resources when an Animal Service response exceeded the capacity of the officers initially assigned," the report noted. "During this incident, additional Animal Services personnel were not readily available, other municipal personnel had identified limitations on their ability to assist with animal-related calls, and responding external personnel did not have clearly established roles or applicable animal-handling training for the assistance required.

"The incident identifies an organizational opportunity to review staffing and deployment arrangements for circumstances requiring multiple trained personnel, including how backup is accessed across the service area, how operational coverage is maintained when municipal officers are committed to one incident, and what contingency resources are available when an incident exceeds the capabilities or resources of the attending personnel."

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Arts & Culture

Doors Open brings new opportunities for residents to experienwwce community

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Sunday marks the return of Doors Open Aurora and there is plenty to explore in buildings not generally open to the public and even more to experience in places that are a bit more familiar.

At this free event, which is being hosted by the Town of Aurora as part of the Town's Month of Culture, more than 20 sites and activities are in store between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.

"We're excited to showcase the spaces and stories that define Aurora," says Michelle Johnson of the Aurora Museum and Archives. "Doors Open Aurora offers a rare opportunity to explore sites of historic and cultural significance throughout our community and celebrate the heritage that makes our Town so unique."

Among the participating locations this year are the Aurora Cultural Centre, which will open its Church Street-facing doors for the occasion, the Aurora Cemetery, which will play host to the Aurora branch of the Royal Canadian Legion's annual Drumhead Service, Hillary House National Historic Site, the Independent Order of the Odd Fellows Lodge 148, Royal Rose Gallery, Micak Contemporary Art Gallery, the Rising Sun Masonic Lodge, Saltbox Café, St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, St. Anne's School, and Trinity Anglican Church.

In addition to the historic sites, Aurora Town Square, Town Park, and Aurora Public Library have plenty on offer.

Within the Aurora Town Square complex, in addition to ongoing exhibitions in the Aurora Cultural Centre, David Heard and his Dave's Vinyl Party will assemble 6ix x 100, a new 100 square foot mural of vinyl album covers showcasing historic Toronto scenes. Organizers describe it as "an uplifting, visually dynamic interpretation of the city's layered history."

Heard will also offer a walking tour from 10 a.m. to 11.30 p.m., departing from Town Park, entitled "The Aurora Storyteller – Walking with the Past."

"Heritage, hope and harmony mesh into lore of uniqueness and linger in your thoughts long after you return home," say organizers of Heard and his tour. "His dedicated research has uncovered inspiring sagas and inspired the preservation of important sites, including the Aurora Pet Cemetery."

Outside Aurora Town Square, Central York Fire Services will showcase their 1926 Lorne fire engine, a mainstay of municipal events for generations after decades in service, as the vehicle marks its 100th anniversary. Participants will be able to get up close with the vehicle and take part in a unique photo opportunity while Fire Services personnel will be on hand to answer questions and share tidbits about local fire history.

Another outdoor opportunity at Town Square is the chance to meet members of the Aurora Museum & Archives team on the front lawn of the historic Church Street School where they will host a Q-and-A about the building, local history, its collections, and seek feedback on what members of the public would like to see in the future.

Over at the Aurora Public Library, staff will showcase how a modern book sorter keeps the Library running smoothly with "backroom experience and learn how it connects today's technology with a rich history of innovation and service, dating back to 1855."

This activity will take place between 1 – 4 p.m.

On the lower level of the Aurora Public Library, the Pine Tree Potters Guild will welcome community members into its long-time studio space were members will demonstrate the potters' wheel and make bowls ahead of their Empty Bowls fundraiser in November.

Local art galleries have joined the effort to make Doors Open 2026 extra special as well.

The Royal Rose Gallery, located at 15210 Yonge Street, will be open throughout the day highlighting Aurora's early retail growth, with a drum circle led by Newmarket musician Glenn Marais from 12 noon to 4 p.m.

Just up Yonge Street at the St. Andrew's Village Plaza, the Micak Contemporary Art Gallery will welcome guests between 12 noon and 4 p.m. for an interactive painting event where participants will be invited to sketch animals and magical creatures that artist Christopher Nelson will "reinterpret and paint onto a piano destined for Aurora Town Square."

For a full roster of Doors Open activities, including locations and times, visit www.doorsopenontario.on.ca/pages/events/aurora.

The Tabriz Ensemble activated the Aurora Public Library's Living Room space on Saturday. There will be plenty more to do there this weekend as the Town hosts its annual Multicultural Festival on Saturday and Doors Open on Sunday. **Auroran photo by Glenn Rodger**

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CULTURALLY speaking
by Ashlyn Gregory
Aurora Cultural Centre
PERFORMING ARTS GALLERIES EDUCATION

COMMON THREADS
Aurora Public Art Festival (September 16-27)

...presents three large-scale outdoor installations by artists Khadija Aziz, Yifu Ding & Zishuo Li, and Roda Medhat that transform the Mirkopoulos Plateia at Aurora Town Square. Working across a diverse range of fibre-based practices, the artists in this exhibition use textiles as a lens to explore identity, visibility, and cultural heritage.

When people hear the term "public art" what often comes to mind is a bronze statue of a historical figure or a mural on the side of a building. While there's nothing wrong with that (I also love a good mural!) - public art can *be* and *do* so much more.

As a curator, I'm drawn to public art by its near-endless potential to transform shared spaces and bring people together. Unbound by the four walls of the traditional white-cube gallery, public art has the unique ability to meet people where they are. Through unexpected encounters with art, public art initiatives spark curiosity, create opportunities for dialogue, and promote a deeper sense of connection within the community.

This is the foundation upon which ***Common Threads*** is built. It's designed to show the community a different side of public art while reflecting the unique identity of Aurora and the people who live here. Together, the works in this festival draw out the common threads between us, celebrating the rich stories woven into the spaces we share.

One of the common threads between the installations is the use of textiles. You may think that textiles aren't an obvious choice of material for public art, and you wouldn't be wrong; it is unconventional. And it's certainly challenging to make fibre-based art that's suitable for outdoor display. Though, as these artists prove, it's not impossible.

But at the same time, what is more relatable than textiles? We wear them, we sleep in them, we decorate our homes in them. Everyone has a personal relationship with textiles, a relationship that is oftentimes inextricable from our identity and culture.

Furthermore, by bringing textile art – traditionally associated with domestic craft – into the outdoors, *Common Threads* challenges the perceived divide between the public and private spheres. In doing so, the exhibition highlights the diversity of cultural experiences that shape our community and invites us to consider our relationship to textiles as symbols of belonging and place.

To delve deeper into the role of public art in communities like Aurora, join us on Sunday, September 20 at 2:00 pm virtually or in-person at the Aurora Cultural Centre for a panel discussion with the artists of ***Common Threads*** moderated by Gallery Manager and festival curator Ashlyn Gregory.

The Aurora Cultural Centre gratefully acknowledges funding for ***Common Threads*** provided partly by the Regional Municipality of York, the Province of Ontario, and Aurora Town Square.

Saturday Night Fever goes Country

Hundreds of country music fans flocked to Yonge Street for the Town's annual Saturday Night Fever event on September 12, this time presented with a country twist. Entertainment included the Country Thunder Show, a tribute to Keith Urban and Shanian Twain (Top Row Left), and The Ultimate Garth Brooks Experience (Top Row, Right), and line dancing (Top Row, Centre). Among those coming out to support the event were (Bottom Row, Left) Mayor Tom Mrakas, (Bottom Row, Centre) and Councillor and Mayoral candidate John Gallo, who was joined by his family. Families that came out to enjoy the party were the Colellas (Centre) and the Brauns (Centre, Right). Also on the street, bottom right, the Aurora Cultural Centre team hosted an art activation, a "wish collection" with Yifu Ding and Zishuo Li, with the collected wishes taking pride of place in the upcoming Common Threads: Aurora Public Art Festival.

Auroran photos by Glenn Rodger

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AURORA VOTES 2026

Growth targets and how to accommodate them discussed by Mayoral candidates

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

The Province of Ontario has set ambitious growth targets for many municipalities across Ontario, including Aurora.

As communities look at ways to meet both growth and housing targets, this week Aurora's four Mayoral candidates were to outline what is, in their views, the best way for Aurora to accommodate the prescribed growth, and whether height limits on new builds should be lifted or expanded accordingly.

Here's how they answered:

SHAWN DEANE – "York Region plans to build 150,000 homes by 2031, with Aurora assigned 8,000 under Strong Mayor powers. These targets are highly ambitious in today's economic climate and should be reevaluated to avoid diverting funds from essential priorities like asset management and repairs. A major concern for taxpayers is the Town's own admission that 'growth no longer pays for growth' — meaning existing residents subsidize new development. My goal is to end this practice by tightening financial governance so that only Development Charges (DCs) fund growthrelated projects. I will recommend separating DCs from the current Growth & New Budget and prohibiting the use of any other tax sources for DCrelated spending. This will require the Town to clearly prioritize which amenities are necessary and which are not. I support higherdensity development near major transit areas without relying on Provincial mandates. However, recent provincial directives have already led to multiple Official Plan amendments allowing 5–6 storey buildings along key corridors such as Yonge & Wellington, St. John's, and soon Yonge Street south. The Town should pause further rezoning until construction begins in these newly approved areas."

JOHN GALLO – "Growth is coming to Aurora, but how we accommodate it matters. I support concentrating much of our future growth along appropriate corridors, particularly Yonge Street and areas with access to transit, services and infrastructure. That allows us to add housing while protecting the character of established neighbourhoods. I don't believe the answer is simply removing height limits across the board. Height and density need to be considered in context. We need to look at infrastructure capacity, traffic, parking, schools, parks, community services and how a development transitions into surrounding neighbourhoods. We also need a greater mix of housing. Young people starting out, families, seniors looking to downsize and people who work in Aurora should have more opportunities to live here. The Province has established growth targets, but Aurora still has a responsibility to plan intelligently. My approach would be managed growth: put density where it makes sense, ensure infrastructure and community amenities keep pace, and insist that development contributes positively to the community we are building."

TOM MRAKAS – "The Province has set ambitious targets, but ambitious doesn't mean unplanned. Aurora's Official Plan can accommodate the growth we've been asked to deliver — we don't need to alter our heights to get there, and I will remain firm on that. We already have 8,800 units in the pipeline against a provincial target of 8,000, and over the last two years alone the Town approved roughly 1,700 units each year — more than double what we're being asked for. That track record speaks for itself: we are hitting our numbers within our existing planning framework. For the last eight years, we have built growth on Aurora's terms, and that's not about to change. Growth is coming one way or another — the question is whether it happens where we've planned for it, with the infrastructure to support it, or whether we cave to pressure and let height and density get dictated to us building by building. I won't let that happen. We are going to keep what makes Aurora one of the most desirable places to live in Ontario and Canada — our neighbourhoods, our green space, our character — while still delivering, and exceeding, the growth targets set for us."

YAFANG SHI – "The housing target imposed on Aurora by the provincial government is linked to the mayor's acceptance of Strong Mayor Powers (SMP), despite a majority of Council voting against them. Aurora failed to meet the provincial target and therefore did not receive the Building Faster Fund. Aurora's housing target should be determined by Council through evidence-based decisions that consider population projections and residents' diverse housing needs. I support the Town's Official Plan on where housing intensification should occur: the Aurora Promenade, Aurora GO Station Major Transit Station Area (MTSA), Regional Corridors, and Local Corridors. Meanwhile, neighbouring residents' concerns must be heard and addressed, while environmental and heritage protections should be carefully considered. New projects should also be evaluated through the lens of affordable housing, consistent with the Town's Affordable Housing Action Plan. The Official Plan, approved in May 2024, limits building heights in the MTSA to seven storeys. However, Council approved four 12-storey condominium buildings in the area through zoning amendments in April 2025. Does this indicate that the seven-storey limit no longer reflects Aurora's growth needs, or was 12 storeys too aggressive? The next Council should review the decision, assess its impacts, and make evidence-based adjustments where necessary."

Aurora needs to "Get Moving" on grade separation on Wellington: Gallo

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Aurora needs to do all it can to advocate for grade separation on Wellington Street East as Metrolinx and GO Transit prepare for a significant increase in train traffic on the Barrie Corridor.

That was the message delivered by mayoral candidate John Gallo outside the Aurora GO Station on Wednesday morning as he launched his "Get Aurora Moving" plan.

The plan emphasizes several ways to improve local traffic flow, from long-proposed vehicle underpass where Wellington meets the train tracks, advancing a traffic interchange at St. John's Sideroad and Highway 404, and improvements to Industrial Parkway.

"There's one issue that I hear most about everywhere I go in Aurora is traffic, at the doors, in our neighbourhoods, from businesses, from parents trying to get their kids to their activities," said Gallo. "People are frustrated and I understand why – because getting across Aurora shouldn't be this difficult."

His "Get Aurora Moving" plan is intended to "tackle the transportation challenges we face today and start planning seriously for the infrastructure we need tomorrow," he said.

"Let's start with one of the biggest challenges facing our community: the rail corridor that runs right through the middle of Aurora. GO service is expanding. That's a good news story for commuters and good news for Aurora," he said, but added that more trains also means "more frequent interruptions on the roads connecting the east and west sides of our Town. Metrolinx and the Town [are] undertaking a traffic analysis around the Wellington Street crossing. That information will be important in understanding the impact on traffic, nearby intersections and surrounding neighborhoods.

"But let me be clear about my position: regardless of what the study ultimately tells us, Aurora needs a grade separation at Wellington Street, and we need to start treating it with the urgency it deserves. Wellington is one of our most important east-west corridors, and train frequency increases, leaving one of Aurora's busiest roads dependent on a level crossing. It is simply not a sustainable long-term solution. As Mayor, I will make securing that great separation a priority. I will work with Metrolinx, York Region, our MPPs and province to build a case, secure the funding and establish a real timeline to get it done."

Mayoral candidate John Gallo outlined his plan to get Aurora "moving" at the GO Station on Wednesday morning.
Auroran photo by Brock Weir

If elected Mayor in the October 26 municipal election, he said he will also work to build the case for an interchange at St. John's Sideroad and Highway 404, something for which Council has long identified as a local priority.

"We know the need is there. Now we need to turn years of discussion into action with a funding project and a realistic timeline," said Gallo. "But Get Aurora Moving isn't just about major infrastructure. It's also about the roads we use every day. Industrial Parkway is a perfect example of why Aurora needs a different approach. In 2015, then-councillor Tom Mrakas brought forward a motion dealing with widening Industrial Parkway. Then, in the 2018 election, he campaigned on moving that project forward. Eight years later, where are the results? Industrial Parkway remains an important north-south alternative to Yonge Street, yet we are still talking about many of the same traffic problems. That is exactly what I want to change.

"We need to take a serious look at Industrial Parkway, better signal coordination, recurring bottlenecks and how our entire road network works together. We need solutions for Yonge Street that improve traffic movements while supporting a vibrant, walkable downtown we all want to succeed."

Referencing incumbent mayoral candidate Mrakas' campaign slogan "Getting Things Done," Gallo said results on traffic haven't been realized.

"It means moving projects forward. It means securing commitments. It means being accountable for what was promised and what was actually delivered. After eight years, Aurora residents have the right to ask, what got done on transportation projects we were promised? Aurora has spent enough time talking about transportation projects. We need to start delivering them."

Theatre Aurora's Yesterday Once More: A Review

Theatre Aurora's musical revue, Yesterday Once More, opens this week.
Auroran photo by Glenn Rodger

BY SCOTT JOHNSTON

Whether we lived through them or heard about them, the 1960s and 70s were an age of change and discovery.

One of the best ways to get a true appreciation of what it felt like to live at that time is through its music. Fortunately for us, Theatre Aurora is bringing it all to the stage in this season's opening production of "Yesterday Once More".

This original musical review conceived by Theatre Aurora veterans Judi Cragg and Neill Kernohan is a live performance of over 40 of the greatest hits of the 60s and 70s. With songs covering the British invasion, Motown, folk, pop, rock, and with some Canadian content thrown in, there's something for everyone.

The songs flow easily with Cragg and Kernohan on stage to provide connecting narration. Painting a picture of the times, they guide us through the changes through the years, complete with trivia, humour and nostalgia. At one point, they even contribute a song.

They have assembled a main cast of eleven talented singers including Jess Falcioni, Derek Falconer, Leanne Goldstein, Carly Alon Laurenza, David Moore, Onajite Olusakin, Martina Paluzzi, Sandra Salvatore Spaventa, Tristan Stansfield, Katie Tanton and Clara Yazbek.

They in turn are backed up on stage by a four-piece band consisting of Mike Bowell on guitar, Brad Bobesich on keyboards, Dr. Keys on bass, and Davide Corazza on drums.

One of the most impressive things about this production is how differently each of the songs is staged.

Some songs are sung solo, for example, Gordon Lightfoot's "If You Could Read My Mind", or the Beatles' "Yesterday". Others include the entire cast ("Aquarius/Let the Sunshine in" and "The Sound of Silence"). Some are performed by only the men ("California Girls") or women ("Happy Together"), and many include both in a dizzying mixture of players.

This makes for a wide variety of vocal combinations, and allows each of the singing and instrumental performers the opportunity to shine.

Another fun feature of the show is the impressive choreography, which is different for each song, and must have been a challenge with over 40 of them, and up to 17 performers on stage at the same time.

Factor in frequent costume changes, and the use of props, videos and lighting, and there is always something different to watch and enjoy during each song.

The result is a very entertaining and original production from Theatre Aurora. You will definitely be tapping your toes and humming along, both during and long after the performance.

Evening performances of "Yesterday Once More" continue at Theatre Aurora, 150 Henderson Drive, September 18, 19, 24, 25 & 26, with matinees on September 19, 20, 26 & 27. Tickets are available through the box office at 905-727-3669.

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AURORA

AURORA VOTES 2026

Parks and recreation opportunities in

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Aurora has seen the opening of new parks and recreation spaces over the last year, along with school board partnerships on artificial turf fields, and land in the Town's southeast earmarked for future park development.

Despite this growth, particularly when it comes to playing fields, there are often studies that show field spaces are in a deficit compared to population.

Rising costs on facility rentals within the York Region District School Board have, in turn, raised questions of affordability for local sports groups and non-profits.

This week, Council candidates were asked to identify areas of and opportunities for improvement in parks and recreation in Wards they hope to represent in the 2026-2030 Council Term.

Here's how they answered:

WARD 1

LAUREN HANNA – "Parks and recreational spaces are essential. They help people move, play, connect and find belonging in our community. Ward 1 is home to many of Aurora's important community spaces, including Town Park, Town Square, the Cultural Centre, and Library. As Councillor, I'll champion these spaces and support their work to meet recreation needs across Aurora. Affordability is an opportunity for improvement. Rising school-gym rental costs threaten access for local sport groups. I strongly support continued advocacy with the school board on this, while maintaining reasonable costs for Town facilities and supporting the Library, Seniors Centre and Town-run programs that provide other forms of affordable recreation. I also support implementing Aurora's Sport Plan, which aims to expand inclusive, affordable participation. As Aurora continues upgrading parks, I see opportunities to use local resident input more consistently to guide improvements, including related to accessibility, climate resilience, and inclusion for residents of different ages and abilities."

ROCCO MORSILLO – "Aurora needs stronger policies when it comes to parkland, recreation and the facilities our families rely on. I believe we need to strengthen our partnerships with local school boards, particularly around field access and fee structures. When Aurora taxpayers have contributed financially to school board fields and facilities, residents should have fair and meaningful access to them. We also need to listen more closely to the people who use our parks every day. I would support stronger community feedback and consultation when decisions are made about park structures, field maintenance and replacement schedules. Our parks and recreational spaces are important investments in Aurora's quality of life. With better planning, stronger partnerships and greater community input, we can ensure these spaces are well maintained, accessible and built to serve Aurora families for generations to come."

WARD 2

ANGELA DAUST – "Ward 2 has always had an issue of the lack of municipal facilities. We have one arena in Fleury Park but no community centres serving this area. This is especially evident in the southwest quadrant, below Wellington and west of Yonge which does not have any Town facilities. One suggestion I have put forth in the past was to build a small community centre on the George Street Public School property with a children's playground. This would be an excellent site to build such a facility as it is already zoned institutional and has an area below that would be perfect for an educational nature area and perhaps sport courts. Community spaces do not need to be large facilities such as the SARC. Smaller sites among neighbourhoods would encourage residents to walk there instead of having to drive."

MARCO DI GIROLAMO – "Any opportunity for residents to engage with nature is a positive. The purchase of the George Street Public School and the development of the 2.7-acre park is a step in the right direction to add needed park land and recreation opportunities for the community and Ward 2 residents. The new Shining Hill Development will also add more trails to our network and provide a seamless integration of the trails in North-West Aurora. Maintenance of these trails will continue to be of utmost importance, especially in the winter months when they become icy and dangerous to traverse. Looking at the Town as a whole, and given the rising costs to use school facilities etc., it will be increasingly important to seek opportunities to reduce or maintain fees for the facilities available to us, but also ensure fees for the use of facilities/fields at the town are maintained at a level that residents can afford."

PHIONA DURRANT – "While recent land acquisitions are positive steps, true parkland improvement cannot be decided in silo or from behind a desk. Before I can speak about something like this, my first step would be sitting down directly with Ward 2 constituents to hear exactly what they want to see in their neighborhoods and Aurora. However, looking at Aurora as a whole, we have a major recreational gap for two key demographics: seniors, you know how much I love the seniors and want us to step up our services for them, and youth. Senior programming shouldn't just be confined inside a building; we need vibrant, sheltered outdoor spaces designed for active exploration, connection, and social play. Meanwhile, residents aged 13 to 25 face a fun desert here. I see in for my boys who are 25 and 16 and their friends routinely forced to leave Aurora for neighbouring cities that offer proper social spaces. We must design modern, engaging spaces that keep our youth and young adults right here in our community. Let's stop box-checking and start planning with the people. Nothing for the people, without the people. Period! This the bottoms-up leader I am bringing to Council."

BRYNN LANSDOWN – "One of Aurora's unique draws is our amazing parks and green spaces. In the last four years, the Town of Aurora has acquired roughly 28 new acres of parkland. I see our opportunity for improvement as thinking beyond the number of acres and focusing more on meeting the needs of families, seniors, people with disabilities, and residents looking for different recreational opportunities. This means looking at things like accessible playgrounds, multi-use spaces, walking connections, shade and seating, washrooms where appropriate, and opportunities for intergenerational use. I also see an opportunity for greater environmental education and stewardship within our parks. How we manage our green spaces today can have impacts that span generations, and our parks can be places where residents learn about and connect with the environment. As Aurora grows, I want us to consider not just how much parkland we have, but whether it is accessible, useful, inclusive, and sustainable for generations to come."

WARD 3

NIKKI ALBER – "Over the last four years, Aurora has taken significant steps to increase parkland and recreational opportunities. These include acquiring nearly 30 acres of land on Yonge Street, George Street and Henderson Drive, adopting the 2023 Parks and Recreation Master Plan, expanding the Aurora Recreation Complex, and investing in parks, playgrounds, splash pads and pickleball courts. I believe the next Council should ensure these investments are distributed fairly across Aurora and that established neighbourhoods receive the same attention as newer areas. Ward 3 has several valued parks and greenspaces, however, it does not currently have a splash pad. I would advocate for a splash pad to be considered as part of an upcoming park renewal, with residents consulted on the most appropriate location. Smaller neighbourhood parks should also receive improvements, such as accessible play equipment, shade and seating, so they remain safe, welcoming and useful to nearby residents. Given the shortage of community space for sports, non-profit organizations and community events, I would support the development of a new sports facility or community centre. I would also support partnerships with schools and community organizations that provide residents with greater access to fields, gyms and other facilities. All of this must be done in a financially responsible way. New amenities should respond to demonstrated community needs, use parkland funds, grants and partnerships wherever appropriate, and include realistic plans for ongoing maintenance."

ALEXANDRA BONHAM – "I believe there is a general consensus by Ward 3 residents that southwest Aurora has been, for lack of a better term, neglected in comparison to other wards. Ward 3 lacks access to a splash pad, public tennis

Continued on page 15

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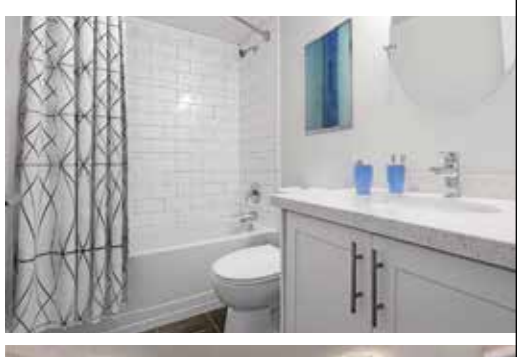

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focus on this week of Council campaign trail

From page 14

court(s), and is away from any recreational facilities. I am always wondering if there is an opportunity for the YRDSB to partner with the Town of Aurora in order to build a multiuse recreational facility on the old Dr. G.W. Williams property. Given the upcoming intensification in the area of 900 residential units, the need for more recreational facilities will continue to increase, but space is at a premium and I believe the most ideal location is the old high school property. It is already home to a racetrack, baseball diamond, and soccer fields and I believe it could support a facility with a pool, rinks, squash courts and more."

ROBERT JAMES FRASER – "Our green spaces are one of my key election pillars. We have greenfield lands slated for commercial/industrial/residential development, but I think we need to take a look at that in the broader context of green spaces for the Town as a whole, and not through a specific Ward view. Here in Ward 3, which is my Ward of residency, we have a spectacular piece of property known as the Anne Bartley Smith estate. This acreage was gifted to the Ontario Heritage Foundation (who later became the Ontario Heritage Trust) to be preserved as green space/parkland. After I moved here in 1993, it became a major issue for the residents of South Aurora, who formed an advocacy group known as S.W.A.T (South-West Aurora Taxpayers). S.W.A.T formed to push back on the Ontario Heritage Fund's intention to sell the land gifted to them to developers. The OHF wanted to sell the Anne Bartley Smith Estate to developers, and in turn the OHF would take that money and protect green space(s) deemed to be more 'environmentally significant' in the province. How does that help the residents of Aurora? I would like to see the Town acquire this land, codify it as parkland so it is protected for future generations, and look at adding usage in a portion of the property for a playground, splashpad, outdoor pool and a soccer pitch/baseball diamond. There are great trails around the property that would benefit all Aurora residents."

HAROLD MacDONALD – "The Town has great participation in both recreational activities and youth and adult sports. Our existing facilities, playgrounds, parklands and walking trails are well used and the Parks and Recreation Master Plan of June 2023 ensures on-going upgrades and improvements. As our Town continues to grow, I would advocate for Council to provide additional facilities, trail connections, etc. – particularly in the newer developments/neighbourhoods. Because of the many benefits, we want Aurorans to be active – an increase in opportunities for improvement and access would naturally increase involvement in our Wards and community."

WARD 4

SHAHEEN MOLEDINA – "Aurora has made important investments in parks and recreation, but there are opportunities to improve access, maintenance, and programming across our community. As a former member of the Town of Aurora's Parks and Recreation Committee, I championed the need for more parks and for ensuring our parks are fully accessible. Ward 4 and Ward 6 have some of the fewest traditional neighbourhood parks in Aurora. While the Town points to massive natural reserves like Sheppard's Bush, families cannot easily push a stroller or play tag in a dense conservation forest. As our population grows, walk-to-neighborhood parkland and recreational opportunities must keep pace with development. We also need to ensure our parks are truly accessible to all families. It is unacceptable that Ward 4 parents have to drive across Town simply to access a splash pad or basic recreational amenity. I would also like to see more off-leash dog parks. Sheppard's Bush is an important asset, but it is not enough for our growing population. As a Councillor, I will ensure these gaps are closed without adding to the municipal tax burden. I will advocate for maximizing the public land we already own and leveraging Section 42 parkland dedication bylaws on new developments. This forces developers—not current taxpayers—to fund the local splash pads and accessible pocket playgrounds our families need. I will continue advocating for equitable, fiscally responsible access to quality parks, playgrounds, splash pads, trails, and recreational opportunities throughout Ward 4 and Aurora as a whole."

WARD 5

JESSIE FRASER – "As a long-time volunteer in Aurora youth sports with a 25-year career in community education and two terms serving on the Aurora Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee I am very invested in Aurora recreation. In terms of programs, I'm proud of Aurora's standing as a Platinum Youth Friendly Community for youth programs. Program opportunities: Town-wide, community collaboration to reflect more diversity in program offerings. Specific to Ward 5, an east-end special event; though it's great to have central hubs like Town Park and Town Square for Town events, a major event at Lambert Willson or Stewart Burnett could help this part of the community feel included. Parks opportunities: Aurora has extensive parkland and trails including the Arboretum here in Ward 5, but we need to continue to grow parkland relative to population, and recent weather events have highlighted the necessity to be proactive in planting to maintain our canopy."

HARBINDER (BINDA) THANDI – "As a father raising two kids in Aurora, our parks, trails, and recreational spaces are a big part of why I love this community. In Ward 5, I'd like to see us take care of what we already have. I will advocate for keeping parks clean, upgrading playgrounds, and improving our trails while looking for new opportunities for families, youth, and seniors to stay active year-round. I also want to hear directly from residents about what's missing in their neighbourhoods. I believe the best ideas come from the people who use these spaces every day."

GEORGE TREMTSIDIS – "We have an abundant amount of parkland in Aurora and there is no need to spend more money acquiring more land. We need to review the activities in our parks and try to bring more communities together by throwing more events in each local park. We definitely don't need to spend money on portable ice rinks and think we should go back to flooding some parks for skating as we waste a lot of money with these portable rinks in our parks. We don't need to add more trees in our parks either as they just did to most of our parks at a very large and unknown cost."

WARD 6

NICHOLAS KASHEF – "Aurora has a huge opportunity, to connect sections of the Aurora Arboretum, David Tomlinson Nature Reserve Trail and other trails across Town, creating a network of mixed-use bike paths, allowing residents more options to get around Town safely on foot, by bicycle and other forms of transportation. This would be transformative for how residents move through Town and a large undertaking, there are also smaller more immediate things that could be implemented in our parks; something as simple as putting up a visible QR code in public parks that directs residents to a page that allows them to report broken equipment, full trash cans or any other concerns, similar to the pilot program in Milton last year would give residents a quick and easy way to get problems they see, fixed in a timely manner."

HAROLD KIM – "In Ward 6, we've built out an abundance of green space and recreation. We completed the 150-acre David Tomlinson Nature Reserve — the envy of York Region — anchoring what is, in my view, the best trail system in the region. We opened John Abel Park, with a community garden, playground, and direct access to the reserve. At Edward Coltham Park, Council delivered a basketball court, pickleball court, playground, splashpad, and two acres of open field. Add the Aurora Recreation Centre, Stewart Burnett diamond, tennis club, and artificial turf field, and Ward 6 is well served. Aurora as a whole is a slightly different story — like every GTA municipality, we need more sports capacity. Demand points to additional baseball diamonds, a second indoor gym, a winter dome for soccer, rugby and baseball, and more soccer fields — especially as the Magna lands come offline within a few years. Council and staff have planned for that loss, with new acreage set to come available in the near future. Overall, Aurora is in good shape on parks and recreation compared to most of York Region — but we're planning now so it stays that way."

(Responses from the following candidates had not been received by press time -- Ward 3: Reza Vaez Ghamsary; Ward 4: Michael Thompson; Ward 5: Charity Dela Cruz Toupin, Milton Hart, Terrence Zhu; Ward 6: Jibraan Khan, Zivka Kicic.)

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TOWN OF AURORA
PUBLIC NOTICE

Legislated Notice as per Municipal Elections Act, 1996 (Section 40)

NOTICE OF ELECTION INFORMATION - 2026 MUNICIPAL ELECTION

NOTICE is hereby given to the Municipal Electors of the Town of Aurora

It's almost time! The 2026 Municipal Election will be held on **Monday, October 26, 2026**. Aurora voters will elect seven (7) members to Town of Aurora Council and four (4) Trustees to the local School Boards.

Voter Information Letters

Voter Information Letters will be mailed to all eligible voters on the Voters' List in early October. To ensure you receive your letter without delay, check that you're on the Voters' List and that your information is up to date.

Any eligible elector who is not on the list, or needs to change their information can do so:

- Online through **aurora.ca/Voters**
- In-person during regular business hours:
  - o Town Administration Office located at **100 John West Way**, until **Friday, October 23** during business hours.
  - o Aurora Public Library located at **15145 Yonge St.**, between **October 16** and **October 25**.
- By phone: **365-500-2159**
- By Email: **elections@aurora.ca**

You must be on the Voters' List to vote. If you don't receive your Voter Information Letter, contact the Town's Elections Team for assistance.

Electors in the Town of Aurora have several ways to cast their ballot in the 2026 Municipal and School Board Election: internet voting, in-person during Advance Voting, or in-person at a ward specific voting location on Voting Day.

Option 1: Internet Voting

Vote from anywhere, from any device, at any time. Internet voting runs continuously from **10 a.m. on Friday, October 16, 2026, to 12 p.m. on Sunday, October 25, 2026**

Council passed By-law Number 6703-25 authorizing the use of voting and vote-counting equipment, such as optical scanning vote tabulators, as well as internet voting for the 2026 Municipal Election.

How to Vote online

To vote online, you must first opt-in. Go to the unique link provided in your Voter Information Letter. You will be asked to enter your personal information and Voter ID that is on your Voter Information Letter. Submit your request for approval. Upon approval, you will receive a unique Voter PIN and link to the Internet Voting System. You can access the Internet Voting System anytime from anywhere starting at **10 a.m. on Friday, October 16, 2026, to 12 p.m. on Sunday, October 25, 2026**. When you have accessed the system, you will be presented with an electronic ballot. Mark your ballot for each contest and click "Submit".

Option 2: In-person during Advance Voting

Vote in-person at the Aurora Senior's Centre during the Advance Voting Period!

Advance Voting will take place at the **Aurora Seniors' Centre**, located at **90 John West Way**. This voting location is open to all eligible electors in the Town of Aurora.

- **Saturday, October 17 - 12 p.m. to 6 p.m.**
- **Sunday, October 18 - 12 p.m. to 6 p.m.**
- **Monday, October 19 - 4 p.m. to 8 p.m.**
- **Tuesday, October 20 - 4 p.m. to 8 p.m.**
- **Wednesday, October 21 - 4 p.m. to 8 p.m.**

Option 3: In-person on Voting Day

Voting Day is Monday, October 26. Voting Locations will be open from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. Your assigned voting locations can be found in your Voter Information Letter or at **aurora.ca/Wards**.

To vote on Voting Day, please bring your Voter Information Letter and an acceptable form of ID with you to vote. A complete list of accepted voter identification can be found at **aurora.ca/Voters**.

Accessibility at Voting Locations

Every effort has been made to ensure that each voting location is as accessible as possible. Here are the number of ways the Election Team is committed to providing an accessible voting process:

1. In preparation for the election, the Election Team visited every voting place to ensure all voting locations are accessible for electors and election workers.

2. The Aurora Senior's Centre will offer an **Accessible Vote Tabulator** to allow electors with disabilities to vote privately and independently through the use of its accessible features such as an Audio Tactile Interface, left-right paddles, and a sip-puff device.

3. A **friend, interpreter or support person** can also assist you at the voting location. The elector and the friend, interpreter or support person will have to swear an oath before assisting in casting the ballot behind the secrecy screen.

4. For more ways the Election Team is committed to providing an accessible voting process, view the Municipal Election Accessibility Plan at **aurora.ca/ElectionAccessibility**.

Proxy Voting

In accordance with Section 42(5) of the Act, voting proxies are **not applicable** to the 2026 Municipal and School Board Election.

Unofficial Results

Unofficial results will not be transmitted until after 8 p.m. on Voting Day - **Monday, October 26, 2026**. Unofficial results will be available at **aurora.ca/vote2026**.

Issued by: Returning Officer/Town Clerk
100 John West Way, Aurora, Ontario L4G 6J1
General Election Information: 365-500-2159
elections@aurora.ca
aurora.ca/Vote2026

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VOL 27 | NO. 50 | 905-727-3300 TheAuroran.com FREE WEEK OF SEPTEMBER 17, 2026

Pan-Am Games Bronze Medalist and Karate Canada National Champion Toupin sets her sights on World Championships in Poland in October

Charisma Toupin

Contributed photo

BY JIM STEWART
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Aurora resident Charisma Toupin earned a bronze medal in Karate at the Pan-Am Games in Costa Rica in July—the latest in a sequence of impressive athletic achievements in 2026.

I caught up with Toupin at Northern Karate School in Aurora after her school day at Ecole Secondaire Catholique Renaissance. The Grade 10 student described her first week back to class: "I like all my teachers. I'm taking a construction class again this year. It's exciting to work with all the machines and tools, especially the table saws."

Toupin, who buzzed through the competition at the Karate Canada National Championships in Alberta in May to earn gold, described her feelings on the podium in Costa Rica and explained the complexities of her Karate event.

"I felt very proud. I was the only person from the Canadian team to win at Kata. It's a choreographed sequence of kicks, punches, and blocks."

The reigning National Karate champion reflected on her performance highlight in Costa Rica: "I had a peak moment when I was on the mat. I beat a girl from Brazil who had defeated last year's gold medalist from the USA."

After capturing her first Pan-Am Games medal, Toupin has set her sights on medaling again at the Karate Canada National Championships in Spring 2027 in Quebec.

"It's a more difficult division—I'll be competing against a four-time Canadian gold medalist who's older than me. I'm definitely hoping to medal and I'm aiming for gold."

The articulate 15-year-old delineated the methods she'll be using to attain her performance goals in Quebec: "I'm going to keep training as I am now and keep pushing myself. I'm starting new drills for strengthening and to increase explosiveness and speed."

Sitting alongside her mom, Charity dela Cruz-Toupin who is running for Town Council, Charisma Toupin gave us a glimpse of what's next regarding upcoming competitions, her immediate training focus, and school goals: "In October, I'm going to Poland to compete in the World Karate Championships. To prepare for next month, I want to continue my running for endurance and leg strength. A bit more weight training will be included in my program. At school this year, I'd like to be part of clubs and committees, but most days, I come here directly from school to continue my training."

Aurora Chamber of Commerce's annual Golf Tournament is enjoyed by dozens of networkers at picturesque and historic Westview GC

BY JIM STEWART
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

The Aurora Chamber of Commerce's annual Golf Tournament was enjoyed by dozens of business owners and community members on Wednesday afternoon at Westview's Middle and Homestead nines.

An ominous forecast of 90% rain did not transpire and a few cloudbursts only dampened the elevated, emerald fairways of Westview.

Long-time General Manager Michael Nisbet offered a topographical explanation for the salvaged tourney: "The varied elevations of the Moraine work in great ways. Often, the storms track north and south of the course and our tee times go ahead on schedule much as we saw at the Chamber's tournament on Wednesday. The elevation helps us."

Nisbet's connections to the course and its nuances are evident. He's a links lifer—representing the third generation of his family providing recreational golf experiences for tournament organizers such as the Chamber of Commerce: "It's great to keep the Chamber's tournament here in Aurora. We've been hosting it for six years."

The Chamber's annual tournament is one of many that Nisbet's hospitality team coordinates every year.

"Wednesdays are set off as our event days. We hosted the Wicked Eats tournament earlier in the Summer. Next week, we're hosting the York Regional Police tournament and we also enjoy hosting the Special Olympics kids on Sundays so they can come out and enjoy a round. It's especially satisfying to see their parents enjoy a glass of wine on the patio and relax knowing that their kids are well looked after on the course. Our partnership with Special Olympics is in its fifteenth year."

The beautiful 27-hole course—with its

Continued on page 19

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YORK ARTISTIC SWIMMING CLUB

Christina Skikos

Christina represented York Artistic Swimming Club with excellence at the National Championships, where she earned the National Championship title in the Adapted Solo event. Her performance reflected countless hours of dedication, perseverance, and commitment to her sport. Christina's achievement is an outstanding example of athletic excellence and serves as an inspiration to athletes within our club and the broader sporting community. We are incredibly proud of her accomplishment and the positive impact she continues to make in adaptive sport.

Christina Skikos and Madeleine Slama

Christina and Maddy proudly represented York Artistic Swimming Club at the National Championships, where they delivered an outstanding performance in the Mixed Ability Duet event to earn the National Championship title. Their routine showcased exceptional teamwork, artistry, trust, and dedication, demonstrating the power of inclusive sport at the highest level. Their achievement reflects countless hours of hard work and serves as an inspiring example of what can be accomplished through determination, collaboration, and a shared passion for artistic swimming. York Artistic Swimming Club is incredibly proud of Christina and Maddy for this remarkable accomplishment and for being outstanding ambassadors for inclusive sport.

Christina Skikos, Madeleine Slama, Renee Lee, Ella Brinder, Kyla Thompson, Muxiao Li - Coached by Sydney Denstedt-Barr and Larissa Ryssina

York Artistic Swimming Club's Mixed Ability Team delivered an exceptional performance at the National Championships, earning the National Championship title with a routine that showcased athleticism, creativity, teamwork, and inclusion. The athletes demonstrated remarkable dedication and perseverance throughout the season, and their success is a testament to the supportive and inclusive environment they have built together. Their achievement highlights the incredible impact of adaptive and inclusive sport, inspiring athletes and communities alike while exemplifying the values of excellence, respect, and belonging.

1st Place Acro Team: Kaitlyn Letichever, Diya Kumareswaran, Jocelyn Hu, Rachell Yavorsky, Jayne Cheung, Sasha Yermolenko, Sophia Farina Vaz, Gigi Bianchi, Sophia Kozachuk-Malik, Yulianna Tarasenko - Coached by Sabrina LoPresti and Alyssa Smith York Artistic Swimming Club's Acrobatic Team delivered an outstanding performance at the Provincial Championships, earning the Provincial Championship title through an exciting and technically impressive routine. Their success reflects months of dedication, teamwork, and perseverance as they worked together to master challenging acrobatic elements and synchronized choreography. This achievement is a testament to the athletes' commitment to excellence and their ability to perform with confidence under pressure. York Artistic Swimming Club is incredibly proud of the team for representing our club with professionalism, sportsmanship, and outstanding athletic achievement.

1st Place 11-12 Regional League Team: Esme Visscher, Isabella Brincovean, Audrey Chan, Kaia Jama, Emma Vuia, Shea Finkelstein - Coached by Carol Ho

York Artistic Swimming Club's Team Goofy 11-12 Team captured the Regional League Championship with an outstanding performance that showcased the athletes' hard work, determination, and team spirit. Throughout the season, the team demonstrated remarkable growth, developing strong technical skills, confidence, and a genuine love for the sport. Their championship performance reflected countless hours of training and exceptional teamwork, making this achievement a well-deserved celebration of their commitment and perseverance. York Artistic Swimming Club is incredibly proud of the Goofy team for representing the club with enthusiasm, sportsmanship, and excellence throughout the Regional League season.

1st Place 13-15 Regional League Team: Mary Chen, Nika Zubkov, Kaitlyn Keihn, Yagmur Ada Durdu, Amitis Vahabi - Coached by Carol Ho

York Artistic Swimming Club's Youth Team Thriller earned the title of Regional League Champions, capping off an exceptional season of growth, determination, and teamwork. Throughout the year, the athletes worked tirelessly to develop their technical skills, artistry, and synchronization, consistently rising to every challenge. Their championship-winning performance reflected their dedication, resilience, and commitment to excellence. York Artistic Swimming Club is incredibly proud of the Thriller team for representing the club with outstanding sportsmanship, passion, and enthusiasm while setting a wonderful example for the next generation of artistic swimmers.

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Aurora Chamber of Commerce's annual Golf Tournament is enjoyed by dozens of networkers at picturesque and historic Westview GC

From page 17

three distinct nines—plays host to an array of community groups and is in its sixty-eighth year of operation. It will provide over 8,500 rounds of golf in 2026 based on Nisbet's rough calculation of "325 rounds per week for the 26 power weeks that we get per season."

Of those 8,500 rounds, the welcoming General Manager suggested that many will be played by members of Westview's Ladies' League.

"We see ourselves as a community and have over 400 participants in the Ladies League which runs on Monday and Tuesday. Most of the ladies play nine and they enjoy their social time on the patio. We have 130 in our Men's League on Thursdays where the guys tend to play eighteen holes."

In addition to the satisfaction of building communities of golf enthusiasts, Nisbet noted that the best part of his job is "that there's something different every day."

Auroran photo by Jim Stewart

"You don't know what you're going to see. Part of that is because we're running three businesses here: the pro shop which is retail; the Cabin House, which is a restaurant; and the turf management side of the golf course which is like running a landscaping business. There's always a new challenge every day. We have employees that have been with us for 25 years. Another interesting dynamic regarding our staffing is that Westview provides people with their first jobs and their last jobs. We employ students who pick up experience with their first job and so many return to us after they finish their school year, but we also employ many recently-retired people who are looking to stay active and have a final job."

In addition to providing work for a range of employees from the surrounding area, Westview's roots in the community run deep.

The golf course has a rich history and legacy.

Nisbet's ancestry manifests itself above the farmhouse fireplace where a portrait of his grandfather, Colin "Pop" Nisbet is displayed proudly. Posthumously inducted into the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame in 2022 as a Builder, "Pop" developed and improved the neglected Aurora Golf and Country Club, renamed it Aurora Highlands, and, as his grandson recollects, "sold it in 1956 after establishing a foothold in the golf business."

Nisbet, speaking in the farmhouse "Pop" purchased in 1955, explained how Westview remains his grandfather's legacy.

"'Pop' bought 200 acres of farmland at Leslie and Vandorf in 1958 and looked out from what is now The Middle's ninth hole tee deck – a great finishing hole – and saw the view all the way west to King Township, and named the course Westview. Homestead was opened to the public in 1958. Middle was built the following year, and Lakeland was opened in 1963. Homestead is popular with golfers who want to walk the course. Middle has the greatest elevation. Lakeland has the greatest number of hazards. By creating three nines, he created a variety of golfing experiences for local golfers. He wanted to make golf accessible to everyone. It's been interesting to note that there's been quite an uptick in demand to play only nine holes. We offer three kinds of nines for seniors, for example, who don't want to play 18 anymore. As we approach our 75th year, we'll put a book together to commemorate the course's beginnings and its current community of golfers. It'll be a coffee table book for people to enjoy."

It was evident on Wednesday that dozens of Chamber tourney golfers enjoyed their round at Westview—rising to the challenges in the Middle and Homestead nines in Scramble teams.

They enjoyed their BBQ lunch at the turn, sponsored by Bruce Spragg, Re/Max Hallmark York Group Realty Ltd; partook in on-course contests including two Hole-In-One contests, sponsored by both Hickory Dickory Decks and McAlpine Ford; a fun golf ball challenge game, sponsored by Julien Laurion Real Estate; and a Putting Green challenge, sponsored by Key Advantage.

The networking golfers also experienced the divine powers of the Westview staff as they turned off the rain that threatened to turn the day into a squishy-sloshy event. They indulged in a libation from the beverage cart, sponsored by CleanRiver Recycling Solutions; enjoyed post-round refreshments and snacks on the patio sponsored by Rothman Real Estate/Samuel Sarick Ltd; and 25 lucky golfers walked away with prizes supplied by the many generous local businesses which donated gift certificates.

The Chamber and Westview offered golfers a memorable afternoon of networking, Scramble golf, and hospitality—a pleasant mid-week escape to count our blessings in mid-September and enjoy the nines that "Pop" Nisbet and his family built over sixty-five years ago.

LIGHTS ON! festival will illuminate area porches with music, art, and more

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Local porches will be abuzz with activity on Saturday, September 26, when Porchlight Arts hosts its very first LIGHTS ON! Art & Music Festival.

The festival is the initiative of the Porchlight Arts collective, which was launched earlier this year by a group of Downtown Aurora residents, looking to bring some extra arts, culture, and fun to the Town's historic core.

The Collective's goal this year, in partnership with the Town of Aurora, was to transform porches in the downtown area into stages for live music, art and creativity – giving residents and visitors alike a free afternoon of community, culminating at Town Park at 5.30 p.m. with a live concert from the acclaimed Canadian band, The Sadies.

"Porchlight Arts launched earlier this year as a volunteer-led, grassroots initiative focused on celebrating and building community connection through arts and culture," say organizers. "At our launch, we shared the idea of creating an event where people could wander through one of Aurora's oldest neighbourhoods and unexpectedly encounter musicians and artists on local porches. On September 26, that idea will come to life.

"Beginning at 1 p.m., visitors will be able to walk through the neighbourhood from porch to porch for live performances and art. The musical lineup includes, among others, folk/indie singer-songwriter Krista Currie, Toronto-based alt-country/roots artist B. Knox, and Aurora jazz guitarist and composer James Brown.

"The event then moves into Town Park, where 10 visual artists will have work on display and for sale, alongside food and beverages. At 5:30 p.m., acclaimed Canadian band The Sadies will headline a free concert. What makes the event special is that it is free and isn't taking place at a traditional venue. Residents are opening up their porches and yards, and artists and musicians are being woven right into the neighbourhood. The community is encouraged to experience Aurora in a unique way."

Porchlight Arts co-founder Ariana Dalie is part of The Happiness Mafia, a live music and production company serving the GTA which has partnered with Aurora Town Square on a number of events, says the idea for LIGHTS ON! was to help grow the Town's "arts scene."

Bringing together a group of like-minded neighbours – "five different women with areas of expertise," she says – their first step was to reach out to the community – and the community certainly answered the call.

"We've been very fortunate because we've received a lot of support from the community, and the community is really excited also that we're doing this because local businesses are going to be able to be involved," she says. "We're providing opportunities also for artists, musicians, and anyone who has a passion for art and involving the community.

"At our kick-off event [earlier this year], people were interested and we had a lot of people volunteer their porches."

These porches will form eight unique stages to visit on the day of the event.

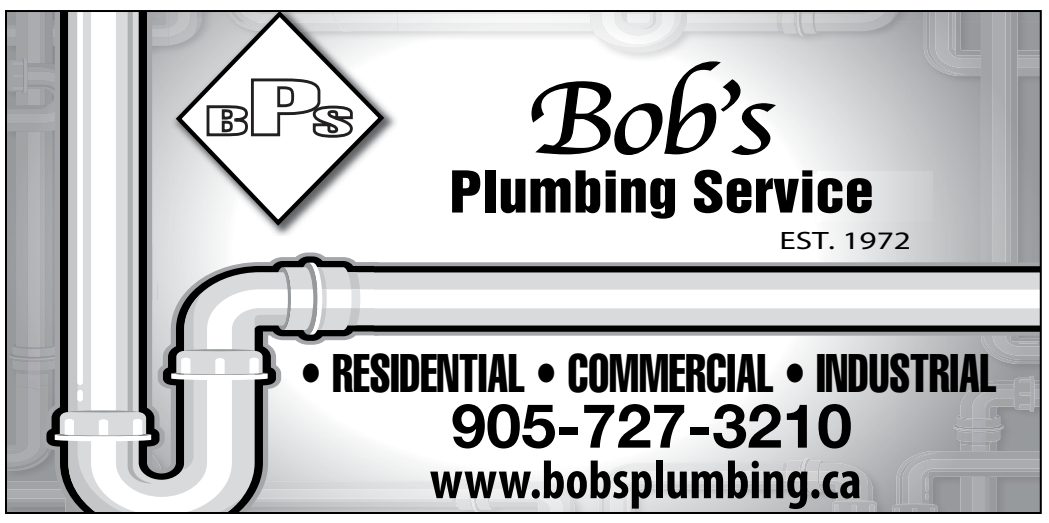
"We have four porches with live music and four with art that people can browse and buy," says Dalie, noting their website features an interactive map with locations all within walking distance of each other, biographies of participating musicians and artists and more. "It's art and live music from 1 – 4 p.m., and then Art in the Park from 3 – 7 p.m."

There are also volunteer opportunities for community members to get involved and help make the magic happen.

"We want participants to explore Aurora, to know that we have good things happening here, that there are people willing to bring something to the community that we can all enjoy for free, that we have a beautiful Town with community members that are willing to help out and make it a more vibrant community," she adds. "We just want to make sure that people come out, enjoy the day and different art and music, and it is a [chance] to get to know your neighbours a little bit more. People from [all] parts of Aurora can spend an entire day where they can do a free activities… and end with a beautiful free concert by The Sadies.

"As this is our first year, we hope to continue to grow it and for people to get in touch if they want to be involved, whether it is a sponsorship, whether it is being part of our community – we're always looking for people who have different types of expertise that can help us put this together."

For more information, visit porchlightarts.ca.



AURORA VOTES 2026

Council Candidates share their

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Last week, Council reviewed a series of recommendations made by Aurora's Cannabis Retail Task Force, a group of citizens and stakeholders that came together earlier this year to discuss the community's experience as an opt-in community allowing these sales.

This week, candidates vying for a place at the Council Table in the October 26 Municipal Election were asked, "How would you assess Aurora's experience as an opt-in community on cannabis retail, and what would you do as a Councillor to address any concerns you and your constituents might have?"

Here is how they answered:

WARD 1

LAUREN HANNA – "Aurora's experience has been mixed. In the Town's 2026 Cannabis Retail Review Survey, which received 154 completed responses, 64% of respondents viewed the impact of cannabis retail negatively and 71% felt there were too many stores; 49% opposed cannabis retail in Aurora and 42% supported it. As a long-time resident and parent living near Yonge and Wellington, I share these concerns, which I also hear while door-knocking in Ward 1. The Town's 2026 Cannabis Retail Review Task Force found no widespread problems, but did find that serious issues can occur around specific locations. Council adopted its recommendations, which I support: clearer reporting, targeted responses, proactive monitoring, and engagement with retailers, property owners and residents. I would also continue Aurora's advocacy for greater municipal authority over store locations, clustering, minimum distances from places like schools and parks, and stronger municipal input into Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario (AGCO) decisions."

ROCCO MORSILLO – "Aurora's decision to allow cannabis retail stores has been a challenging issue, and I've heard strong arguments from residents and local businesses. Aurora should have put stronger and more detailed rules in place from the beginning. Concerns about proximity to sensitive locations such as schools, community centres and libraries need to be taken seriously and existing by-laws strictly enforced. We also need to address the issue of store clustering. Having too many cannabis retailers concentrated in one area can change the character of a neighbourhood and create concerns for residents and other businesses. Aurora should have also considered a cap on the total number of cannabis retail stores allowed in our community. Moving forward, we need stronger by-law enforcement, regular liaison meetings with YRP, and ongoing communication with residents and business owners. I would support regular monitoring and an annual review process for cannabis retail locations to ensure they remain compliant with municipal regulations."

WARD 2

ANGELA DAUST – "A community survey was commissioned by Aurora to find out what residents thought about our town's decision to opt into cannabis retail. The majority of residents, 64 percent, feel that cannabis retail stores have had a negative impact on Aurora. Many cited problems with litter, loitering, noise and parking issues, as well as the concern of youth exposure to these establishments. As a Councillor, I would question the number of cannabis establishments that Aurora has and work to pass legislation to cap the number of these stores in Aurora. With regards to the problems such as loitering, littering and noise, bylaw services could be engaged to monitor these establishments on a regular basis to ensure they comply with local bylaws. Another suggestion would be to only allow cannabis retail outlets to open in areas away from residential areas. The Town of Aurora could also partner with the York Region District School Board to teach youth about the potential impacts of cannabis use."

MARCO DI GIROLAMO – "I would say the experience has not been what was expected or planned. Unfortunately, at the time of opt-in, our surrounding communities (King, Richmond Hill and Newmarket) chose not to opt-in, putting an undue burden on the Town of Aurora and a disproportionate amount of cannabis retail for a small town like ours. As a Councillor, in collaboration with the rest of Council and the Mayor, I would lobby the Provincial government to limit the amount of retail licenses for our community. I would also work with our By-law department to more actively enforce our no smoking laws and make sure cannabis is not being consumed in parks, playgrounds, retail establishments and schools."

PHIONA DURRANT – "The recent conversation surrounding cannabis retail in Aurora completely misses the mark. The issue is not the legalization of cannabis itself or that we have them in Aurora; it is a total lack of localized zoning control and absolute weakness from our local government. When the Town of Aurora chose to opt into this framework, Council requested a 150-metre buffer from daycares and mental health counseling wellness centers. Yet, I have personally seen stores sitting too close to daycares and literally attached to counseling centers. If you choose to opt into a system, you better be damn sure your municipal bylaws actually mean something and can be enforced. Otherwise, don't opt in at all. Right now, rules on paper mean nothing, and all we are seeing from elected officials is a box-checking game to look like they are doing something. Our Town's own Cannabis Retail Review Task Force recently confirmed exactly what residents see every day: 71% of surveyed locals feel Aurora has too many stores. Nearby municipalities like Markham, Vaughan, and Richmond Hill actually did their jobs from day one. They used their authority to opt out entirely until strict; protective local controls could be guaranteed. Let's stop passing the buck and hiding behind the province. We need a complete freeze on any new cannabis retail licenses in Aurora, period. When elected, I would call for us to go back and aggressively review the locations of existing stores that are sitting way too close to sensitive spaces. It is time for our elected officials to stop playing with people's emotions, start protecting our community, and finally do their jobs. That is the leader you have in me."

BRYNN LANSDOWN – "I've heard a fair amount of concern about retail cannabis while door knocking, and the biggest concern I'm hearing is clustering. I think it's important to separate concerns about retail cannabis itself from concerns about how stores are located and concentrated in our community. While researching this, I found that the Town's Cannabis Retail Review Task Force found that retail stores have generally not created significant town-wide public safety or enforcement concerns. It did, however, identify location, clustering, compatibility, and nuisance impacts as areas of concern. The Task Force also highlighted the limits of municipal authority. As a Councillor, I would support continued monitoring, clearer reporting channels and targeted enforcement where needed. I would also advocate to the Province and AGCO for municipalities to have more say over separation distances, setbacks, and clustering. I think Aurora should use the authority it has, while pushing for the authority it needs to manage clustering and protect neighbourhood compatibility."

WARD 3

NIKKI ALBER – "As a member of Aurora's Cannabis Retail Review Task Force, I have researched the regulations, enforcement responsibilities and community impacts associated with cannabis retail in Aurora. Currently, the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario determines where and how many stores are approved and is responsible for licensing, regulating and

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views on cannabis retail in Aurora

enforcing those stores. Although Aurora understood these limitations when it opted in, our experience has shown me that municipalities need a stronger voice. Residents have raised legitimate concerns about the number and concentration of stores, their proximity to residential areas and places used by children, and issues such as odour, litter and disruptive activity around particular locations. As Councillor, I would support consistent enforcement of matters within the Town's authority, including property standards, signage, litter and smoking regulations, while ensuring complaints about individual businesses are properly documented and directed to the appropriate authority. I would also educate residents about how and where to report concerns, including suspected non-compliance, and advocate directly to the AGCO for timely action. Most importantly, I would advocate to the Province and the AGCO for municipalities to have greater authority over store locations, clustering and reasonable separation distances. The goal should be to ensure cannabis retailers are appropriately located, responsibly operated and compatible with the surrounding community."

ALEXANDRA BONHAM – "The most important thing a Councillor can do is listen to residents' concerns and take action where it is appropriate. I respect the concerns some residents have with regards to the number of legal cannabis shops in Aurora, but it is important to remember that cannabis retail is legal and they deserve the same respect we would give to any other local business. Like all new things, there is always going to be a burst of people upfront that will try to take advantage of an opportunity for success, and like all things that success is based on supply and demand. Of course, it will always be important to ensure that cannabis retail is operating under the appropriate rules and regulations in order to protect Aurora's youth and even those that partake."

ROBERT JAMES FRASER – "Cannabis has been legalized by the Federal government and like alcohol products, is available to Canadians of legal age to purchase. The Town of Aurora jumped on the legalization train and according to the AGCO, 18 retail locations have been approved to operate in Aurora to date, although not all of the 18 approved locations have opened. According to the AGCO's website, 13 cannabis retail locations are currently operating in Aurora. Considering we have three LCBO outlets for alcohol products (spirits) that remain controlled and not at retail, 13 locations to serve Aurora cannabis consumers does feel like overkill. My position is that Aurora has more than enough retail locations for cannabis. If there are specific locations that are causing concerns for residents, they should be addressed by Bylaw Enforcement. Retail locations selling beer and wine are all over Town – are we having residents complain about them or are we singling out the cannabis consumer as 'different' from the alcohol consumer? I see consumers of both products through the same lens."

HAROLD MacDONALD – "I believe the overall experience with cannabis stores in our community has been negative. Data from Aurora Council's survey indicates that 64% of residents have a negative view regarding shops in our town, and 71% say there are simply too many stores. (The Auroran, Sept 3) As Councillor, I would advocate that Council take action: limiting the total number of stores permitted in our Town; restricting locations to appropriate areas, away from youth exposure; ensuring adequate parking is available at each location; developing strict rules about how and where packaging and containers can be discarded; providing safe disposal locations of unused products, as leftover cannabis is highly dangerous to children and pets."

WARD 4

SHAHEEN MOLEDINA – "I believe Aurora's experience as an opt-in community for cannabis retail has been mixed and deserves an evidence-based review. Legal, regulated cannabis businesses can provide economic benefits, but we must also address impacts on residents and neighbouring businesses. I have heard directly from businesses adjacent to cannabis shops about increased vaping and smoking outside their premises, creating concerns about smoke and odour for customers and employees. As a business owner myself, I know how vital a clean, welcoming storefront is to a company's bottom line. I have also heard from parents concerned about the cannabis shop on Wellington Street located next door to a tutoring business attended by school-aged children. These concerns deserve to be taken seriously. Aurora currently has a dedicated Cannabis Retail Review Task Force that handles cannabis-related matters. As a Councillor, I will support its work, listen to residents, parents, and businesses, and monitor clustering. However, to truly protect our community, we must move beyond passive monitoring. I will actively advocate for tighter municipal zoning and updated Community Improvement Plans (CIPs) to establish strict buffers around sensitive educational sites. I will also push council to formally lobby the province for greater municipal autonomy over retail density. My approach is responsible regulation, community compatibility, protecting children, and supporting local businesses."

WARD 5

JESSIE FRASER – "Aurora chose not to opt out of cannabis retail, which means that we permanently opted in. Resident concerns I've heard include the number of locations and proximity to schools. Unfortunately, provincial legislation severely limits municipal oversight in this area. Council cannot create separate zoning or licensing rules or dictate location, but merely submit feedback; the provincial regulator is responsible for approvals. This has not proven to be successful; as far back as the initial 2019 opt-in Council requested proximity considerations for schools, public facilities, etc. but were rejected. The 2026 Cannabis Retail Review Task Force identified number and location of stores, proximity to youth, and neighbourhood impact as ongoing concerns and the provincial limitations on municipal control as problematic. As Councillor, I will focus on ongoing engagement with retailers when community problems arise and collaborative partnerships with other municipalities to lobby the provincial government for greater autonomy over future cannabis retail decisions."

HARBINDER (BINDA) THANDI – "I would have strongly advocated against cannabis retail in Aurora; however, cannabis retail is now a part of Aurora, but I believe residents should have a meaningful voice in how it affects our community. As Councillor, I would listen to concerns about the number of stores, store locations, youth exposure, and neighbourhood impacts, while recognizing the limits of municipal authority. I would use every tool available to advocate for responsible locations and appropriate safeguards. Residents may not always agree, but they deserve to know their concerns are genuinely heard and considered when decisions affecting their neighbourhoods are made."

GEORGE TREMTSIDIS – "The number of cannabis stores in Aurora has become out of control and not needed. I think it doesn't reflect well on our Town and our reputation. This needs to be reviewed even if we need to opt out if possible, in my opinion. Cannabis is a gateway drug in my opinion and when the federal government legalized it, our society has taken a turn for the worse. Again, I would do my best to ban any future openings and review the ones we have to determine if we can have some of them closed but I believe this is a provincial decision."

WARD 6

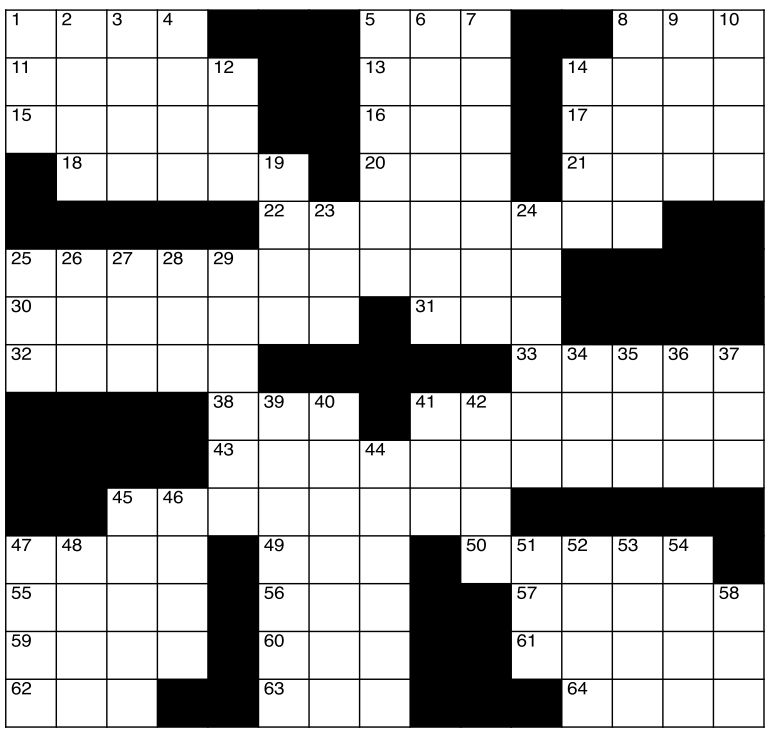
NICHOLAS KASHEF – "While several concerns have been raised by residents, particularly nuisance complaints about loitering, litter and the distinct odour that can surround dispensaries, overall I think Aurora was correct to allow retail cannabis stores, I see two root causes of many people's dissatisfaction however, the province has failed to give municipalities planning control over the density of dispensaries, and Newmarket, Vaughan, Richmond Hill and Markham's choice to opt-out of allowing dispensaries has concentrated them within Aurora. As a Councillor I would work with our MPPs to pressure the Ontario government into allowing municipalities more control over how many and where dispensaries are allowed within municipalities. This was a reason given as to why Newmarket refused to allow them in the first place. When you give local residents a better say in how we implement legal cannabis retail, more municipalities are willing to do it."

HAROLD KIM – "Aurora is one of only two York Region municipalities that opted in — and residents have felt the consequences, with stores clustered along our main streets. I voted against opting in back in January 2019 for exactly this reason. We all know that cannabis retail is provincial jurisdiction, controlled through the Alcohol and Gaming Corp of Ontario (AGCO). Municipalities can't approve or cap stores — we can only comment on individual applications. That's why, in November 2023, I brought forward a motion, passed by Council, calling on the province and AGCO to stop accepting further applications in Aurora and set a population-based cap per municipality. The precedent exists — the province already limits how many grocers can sell beer and wine. As Councillor, I'll keep pressing Queen's Park for that cap and support the current task force reviewing local impacts, so no community faces the same intensification we did."

(Responses from the following candidates had not been received by press time -- Ward 3: Reza Vaez Ghamsary; Ward 4: Michael Thompson; Ward 5: Charity Dela Cruz Toupin, Milton Hart, Terrence Zhu; Ward 6: Jibraan Khan, Zivka Kicic.)

CROSSWORD

Puzzle No.TASEPT1726 • *Solution in Classifieds*



CLUES ACROSS

1. Egyptian bull god
5. A young canine
8. North Carolina university
11. "Oddbod" actor Tom
13. Midway between northeast and east
14. A place to shop
15. Mysterious "Severance" family
16. Single Lens Reflex
17. Malaria
18. Informal loan organizations
20. Twitching
21. Holm oak
22. Willing to consent
25. In an early way
30. Stuck it out
31. Language in Ghana
32. Obtain
33. Ancient Greek currency
38. One point east (clockwise) of due north
41. Popular baseball movie
43. Group of islands
45. Church building
47. Ancient kingdom near Dead Sea
49. Late AC/DC frontman Scott
50. Spiritual leader of a Jewish congregation
55. Thick piece of something
56. Breakfast food
57. One mole of solute per kilogram of solvent
59. Ancient Greek City
60. Bitterly regret
61. Don't forget it
62. Dishonorable man
63. Affirmative
64. "__ and flows"

CLUES DOWN

1. Bridge-building degree
2. Expression of sorrow or pity
3. Lizard species
4. Turkish leader title
5. A way to bother
6. Blank
7. A fine, closely woven cotton fabric
8. Sports broadcaster Ian
9. Popular whodunit board game
10. Alkali flats mineral
12. Large African antelope
14. It's delivered most days
19. Satisfy
23. Water soaked soil
24. Of a past era
25. Chest muscle (slang)
26. Ribonucleic acid
27. Doctor of Education
28. Coffee receptacle
29. Where rockstars work
34. International airport in Connecticut
35. Russian river
36. It's used to make cabins
37. OJ trial judge Lance
39. A means to persuade
40. Short poem
41. A way to begin hostilities with
42. Multi-function radar (abbr.)
44. Joints
45. Blatted
46. Swedish rock group
47. Millisecond
48. __ podrida: Spanish stew
51. Doctors' group
52. Trunk of a tree
53. Tattle
54. Metrical foot
58. __ Angeles

Fire up the fun at Central York Fire Services' annual fall Open House

CONTRIBUTED

Central York Fire Services (CYFS) invites Aurora and Newmarket residents to the annual Open House on Saturday, September 19 from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at Ian Laing Headquarters (Station 4-5) at 300 Earl Stewart Drive in Aurora. The annual Open House is an opportunity for the community to get to know their local fire department and learn more about simple but important actions everyone can take to prevent fires at home.

Stop by for morning coffee and donuts, BBQ hot dogs, the Tim Hortons Express Train, arts and crafts, prizes, games, "Sparky the Fire Dog", interactive fire safety activities and much more! It's an educational event the kids will love!

Attendees are encouraged to bring a refillable water bottle to stay hydrated and bring a non-perishable food donation to support the Newmarket Food Pantry.

CYFS is offering a Dunk Tank for Good! Purchase 3 balls for $5 with all proceeds donated to the Hawkins-Gignac Foundation which aims to prevent carbon monoxide tragedies.

- **When:** Saturday, September 19, 2026
- **Time:** 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.
- **Where:** 300 Earl Stewart Drive, Aurora

The event is in recognition of the upcoming Fire Prevention Week (October 4-10), which centers on the theme of "Charge into Fire Safety" sparked by the growing fire risk surrounding lithium-ion batteries which power electronics people use everyday. The aim is to help educate the community on how to buy, charge and recycle batteries safely.

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SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 19

The Aurora Farmers' Market continues at Town Park today from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m.

* * * *

The Town of Aurora will host its annual Multicultural Festival today from 9 a.m. to 12 noon at Aurora Town Park, and from 12.30 – 4 p.m. at Aurora Town Square. Aurora Town Park will include back -to- back vibrant cultural performances in the band shell. The park will include the Community Zone with fun activities provided for the whole family. The Aurora Farmers' Market will be in full operation with fresh food and artisan vendors. Aurora Town Square's festival's vibrant back-to-back cultural performances continue in the Outdoor Square along with a Community Corn Roast. Inside the Aurora Town Square will include many flavours from around the world to sample food from, face painting, henna, balloon twisting and more! This festival will take you on a one-of -a-kind cultural tour as we celebrate our community's roots, vibrant traditional clothing, and wonderful cultural dance performances from around the world. Experience how other cultures celebrate food, art and dance with a fully-packed entertainment line-up. For more, visit aurora.ca/multiculturalfestival.

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 20

Doors Open Aurora will take place across the community today. Step inside Aurora's hidden stories! Doors Open Aurora invites residents and visitors to explore the town's rich history, architecture and community spaces through a free, behind-the-scenes experience. Discover unique heritage sites, cultural landmarks and local institutions that are not always open to the public, and connect with the stories and people that make Aurora special. Meet the people who bring these places to life and uncover the stories that shape Aurora's unique character. Whether you're a history enthusiast, architecture lover, or simply curious, there's something for everyone to discover! For a map of all locations and a full roster of activities, visit aurora.ca/doorsopen.

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 23

Garden Aurora's speakers Series continues with Dorte Windmuller, speaking on Winter Sowing Native Plants. She will also have native plant seeds available. Join us for free at The Royal Canadian Legion, 105 Industrial Pkwy North (lower rear entrance) Doors open at 7:00 p.m. for second hand table, information exchange, exhibitions, coffee, and snacks. Speaker starts at 8:00 pm, followed by our flower show. For more information, please visit www.gardenaurora.ca

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 24

The Aurora Historical Society's Speaker Series continues with Inherited Knowledge with Tarryn Andrews. Explore how modern medical knowledge developed from ancient Greek and Roman scientific thought and why this is relevant today. Through an examination of topics such as anatomy, women's health, and medical remedies, this talk considers how this knowledge was preserved and adapted over time. Hybrid: In person at Hillary House or online via Zoom. 7 p.m. Tickets are $12.50 pp. For more, visit aurorahs.com or call 905-727-8991.

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* * * *

Support AbuseHurts' Delivering Hope Full Circle Program textile recycling and donation program. A greater number of people are wanting to donate or get rid of unwanted items, increasing the need for more outlets being available to receive the items. This program will provide a convenient way for people to donate or get rid of used/unwanted clothing, blankets, linens and furniture and will help lessen the amount of items ending up in landfills. Materials that were previously perceived as waste will now be seen as a valuable resource further encouraging redistribution. The items will be recycled in the following ways: To be given to individuals who are survivors of violence and are transitioning from shelters into new homes; To be sold in our store; To be sold to a textile recycler, which makes for an ongoing source of funding for Abuse Hurts enabling them to provide their services to the thousands of people that require them each year. When and Where: Monday and Wednesday, every week, 10 a.m. – 4 p.m., with 30-minute time slots – only 1 drop off per time slot. If you do not have an appointment, we cannot accept your donation. The Abuse Hurts Warehouse is located at 1208 Gorham St, Unit 4, Newmarket - rear unloading dock. Visit AbuseHurts.ca to select your drop off time slot.

AURORA VOTES 2026

From page 4

encourage residents to shop locally and lead by example. Whenever possible, the Town should purchase goods and services from local businesses, keeping municipal spending within our community and supporting local jobs. These are practical steps Council can take to help strengthen Aurora's economy during an uncertain time."

HAROLD KIM, Candidate Ward 6 – "I support our Buy-Canadian procurement stance — it's the right signal. But to be honest: our own procurement is a fraction of one percent of the issue. A business shipping into a U.S. supply chain isn't saved by who Town Hall buys photocopiers from. After 25 years in financial services, I know what carries a business through a shock: cash flow and certainty. So, the biggest thing Council actually controls is the local cost and speed of doing business. When a tariff eats at an employer's margin, they can't also absorb slow approvals or a tax hike. Fast permitting and a stable tax burden are our most direct way to keep those doors open and those paycheques here. The longer game is diversification — as part of the Aurora Economic Development Corp Board, I'm working to attract medtech and biotech firms that are less tariff-exposed, so one trade war can't put this many Aurora jobs at risk."

Question #2: *Concerns continue to mount regarding the use of e-bikes and e-scooters in the community. How do you think the Town should address the safe use of this ever-popular way of getting around?*

NIKKI ALBER, Candidate Ward 3 – "There are three practical actions the Town can take regarding illegal e-scooters and e-bike use in Aurora. First, Council should prioritize proactive by-law patrols on Town property, including sidewalks, trails and parks. A visible enforcement presence would discourage illegal riding in these areas and allow officers to address unsafe behaviour before someone is seriously injured. Second, we need to better educate riders and parents about the existing laws. The Town should use social media, signs in parks and along trails, and information mailed directly to residents so that people clearly understand where these vehicles may be used, the minimum age requirements and the rules riders must follow. Third, the Town must advocate for stronger provincial legislation that makes enforcement more practical and effective. I recently proposed to our MPP, Michael Parsa, that riders should be licensed and that these vehicles should be registered, plated and insured. This would make riders more accountable and help enforcement officers identify those who break the law or leave the scene of an incident."

HAROLD KIM, Candidate Ward 6: "I back York Regional Police's education-first approach, and as a father I understand why parents worry. But enforcement is where most people stop, and we can't ticket our way to safe streets. Making the rules clear is where the Town can act. I brought forward a motion earlier this year to post signs at every entrance to our trail system, so everyone knows e-scooters and motorized vehicles aren't allowed there. The next step is point of sale: today a resident can buy an e-scooter in Aurora with no idea it's illegal on our roads and sidewalks. I'd have the Town work with local retailers so buyers learn the rules when they buy and ensure that safety equipment are used. We also need to give riders a safe, legal place to go, building protected infrastructure that serves both sides — the resident nervous about scooters, and the teenager who just wants a safe way to school."

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