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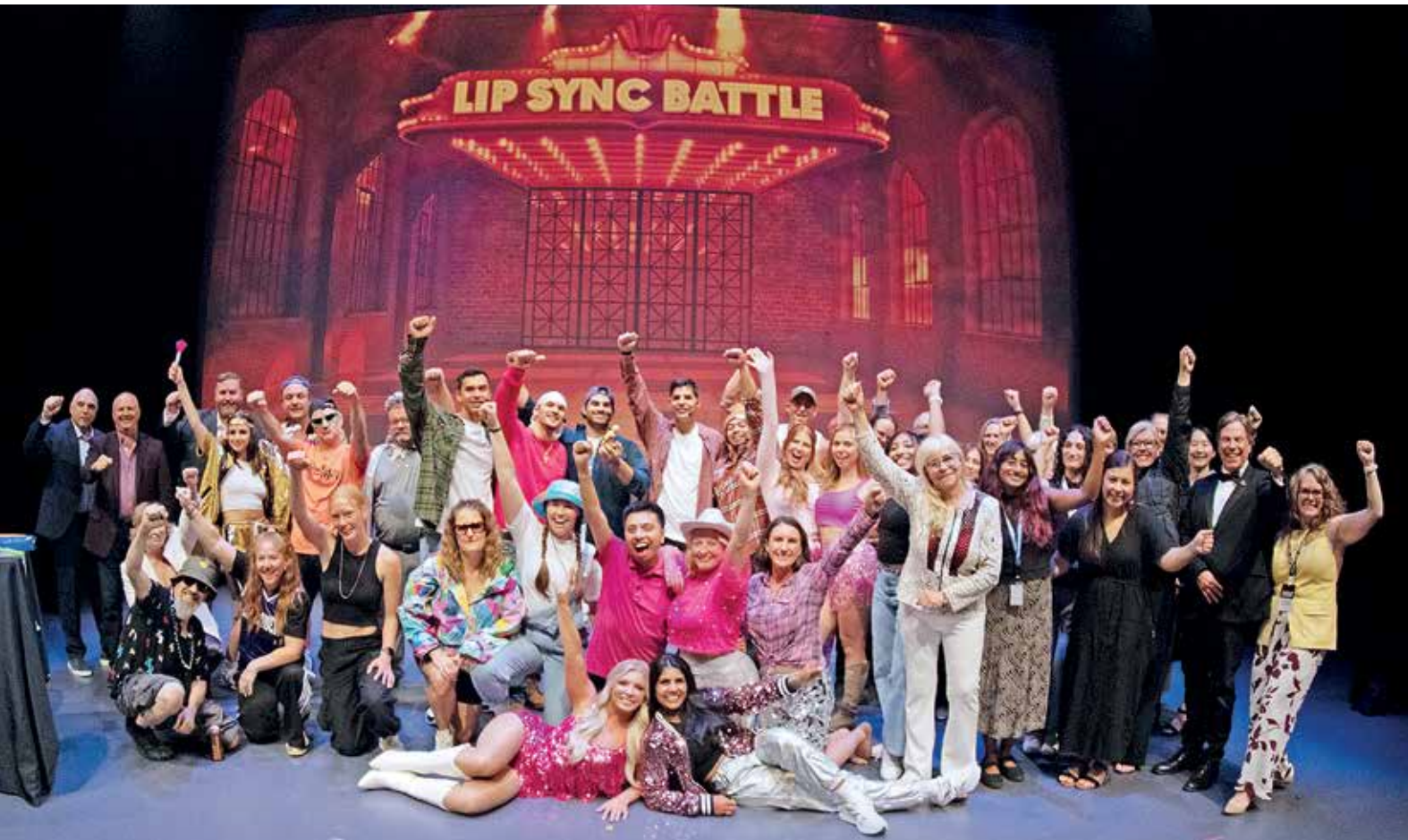
Aurora's Community Newspaper

TheAuroran.com

VOL 27 | NO. 51 | 905-727-3300

FREE

WEEK OF SEPTEMBER 24, 2026



Community teams came together this month to raise tens of thousands for Victim Services of York Region at their annual Lip Sync Battle, hosted at Aurora Town Square. Among the participants was Riley Allen, an Aurora teacher, who has had a very busy month of advocacy both in the community and beyond.

Auroran photo by Glenn Rodger

Local teacher rallies students, hits runway for cancer care, community support

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

September is always a busy month for Riley Allen.

It's back-to-school season for the Aurora French-immersion teacher, which brings its own challenges, but this year she's underscored her very personal story to community members hitting the stage for this month's Lip Sync Battle, raising vital funds for Victim Services of York Region, rallying her school community

for the Terry Fox Run, and, on Sunday, taking the runway alongside children facing cancer and neurofibromatosis for the Enchanted Hope Foundation's gala.

The Enchanted Hope Foundation is a York Region-based non-profit that creates immersive community experiences for children and families across the GTA, capturing the imaginations of children through storytelling, connecting families, and much more.

It's a cause very close to Allen's heart. As a child, Allen was diagnosed with a

rare form of cancer which left her with a reconstructed leg from the knee down.

In an effort to help other children following similar journeys, Allen's mother wrote a storybook, "Riley's Socks," which Allen herself parlayed into a line of inspirational loungewear and apparel.

"It was a really big support for me as a kid because growing up in school having this reconstructed leg that kind of looked extremely different from the

Continued on page 21

CULTURAL SHOWCASE



Another exciting event brought to you by:

AURORA

AURORA'S MULTICULTURAL FESTIVAL

Performers representing the Chinese culture were among the groups that graced Aurora Town Park (pictured) and Aurora Town Square on Saturday for the Town's annual Multicultural Festival. For more on this year's event, see Page 11.

Auroran photo by Glenn Rodger

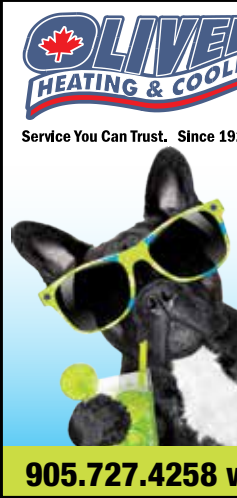
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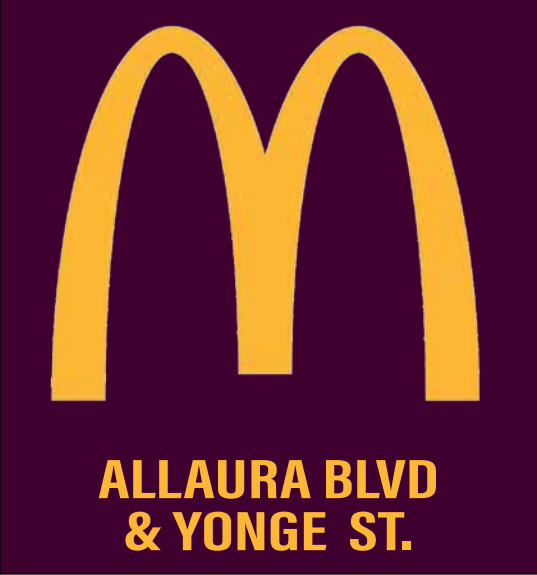


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A refreshing lemonade beverage with the sweet taste of fruity flavours and topped with freeze-dried fruit or popping pearls.

TOWN OF AURORA

NOTICE BOARD

September 24, 2026



Council & Committee Meetings

Date	Time	Location	Meeting
Week of September 28	No meetings		
Thursday, October 8	7 p.m.	Video Conference	Committee of Adjustment
Week of October 12	No meetings		
Wednesday, October 21	7 p.m.	School House Mtg Room	Aurora Cultural Centre Board
Wednesday, October 21	7 p.m.	Aurora Public Library	Aurora Public Library Board

*Committee of the Whole, Public Planning and Council meetings are available to the public in-person and via live stream on the Town's YouTube channel.

What's Happening

NATIONAL DAY FOR TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION ALL WELCOME

September 30, 2026

Aurora Town Square • 50 Victoria Street

Join us for an evening of reflection, learning and connection.

5 p.m. - Hands on Activities
6 p.m. - Truth Ceremony

Sacred Fire

Truth Reflection by Anishinaabe
Grandmother Kim Wheatley

Ancestral Knowledge Keeper Raiden Levesque
& Elder Pat Floody

Together we will listen, learn, reflect, and participate in the journey of Truth and Reconciliation.

Complimentary soup prepared by Indigenous caterer, Wholesome Conscious.
(while quantities last)

aurora.ca/TruthAndReconciliation

Online Skylight Gallery Exhibition

Featured Artists: Tegan Weatherup-Leach - Watched

Watched is an exploration of all the subtle expressions of animals. From curious to content, these portraits revel in the personalities you observe when watching them go about their daily lives. Watch and be watched with this collection of characters. View in-person at Aurora Town Hall in the Skylight Gallery. View online at aurora.ca/SkylightGallery. All work is for sale. Please contact Sarah Reynolds at sreynolds@aurora.ca if you are interested in investing and owning a beautiful piece of art.

Learn who's running for office



aurora.ca/Candidates

Fall 2026 Program Guide

The Fall 2026 Program Guide is available online and programs are still available. Register online at aurora.ca/ProgramGuide. View the guide and click on the code # to register online. Pay in-person at the A.F.L.C, A.R.C or A.T.S.



Join the Aurora Farmers' Market Board of Directors! Deadline to apply is October 1!

The Aurora Farmers' Market, one of York Region's premier community destinations, is seeking passionate, community-minded individuals to help shape its future. Since 2002, the market has grown into a vibrant hub that welcomes approximately 1,600 visitors every Saturday, connecting residents with local farmers, artisans, food producers, musicians, and community organizations. Board members play a key role in governance, strategic planning, programming, budgeting, marketing, and organizational leadership while supporting local food, small businesses, and community engagement. Whether your background is in business, finance, marketing, events, governance, agriculture, or simply a passion for community building, your skills can make a meaningful impact. **Recruitment is open until October 1, 2026.** To apply, email info@theaurorafarmersmarket.com with your name and a brief explanation of why you would like to join the Board. Help ensure the Aurora Farmers' Market continues to grow, innovate, and thrive for years to come!

YOUR TOWN.
YOUR VOTE.

Check your voter information before October 1, 2026.

aurora.ca/Voters

E-WASTE EVENT

Drop off your electronics for safe disposal
October 3, 2026 - 10 a.m. - 2 p.m.
Joint Operations Centre



aurora.ca/EWaste

BOLLYWOOD 101

October 18 - November 22
4 to 5 p.m.



Explore authentic Bollywood dance in a fun, inclusive space. Perfect for beginners!
Join our new 6-week series.

AGES 14+ - REGISTER:
AURORA.CA/WHATSON



SAFE SPORT DAY IN AURORA

WITH ALLISON FORSYTH & RICK WESTHEAD

Saturday, October 17, 2026
Session 1 - 10:30 a.m. to 12 p.m.
Session 2 - 1:30 p.m. to 3 p.m.
Aurora Town Square • 50 Victoria Street

TICKETED EVENT • REGISTRATION REQUIRED

aurora.ca/SportWorkshops



WINDROW REMOVAL PILOT PROGRAM

For seniors and people with disabilities

Apply by October 15, 2026



aurora.ca/Windrow



Fall Faves

October 10 | 10 a.m. to 12 p.m.

Embrace the crisp air and cozy vibes with Fall Faves, a free, family-friendly event full of autumn magic.

Story time, pumpkin carving & more:
aurora.ca/WhatsOn



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YouTube

Mental Health in Motion raises nearly \$40,000 – and counting – for youth programs



Newmarket-Aurora MPP Dawn Gallagher Murphy, far right, and Canadian Mental Health Association of York Region and South Simcoe CEO Andrew Chung, centre, are pictured warming up ahead of last weekend's Mental Health in Motion event in Newmarket. **Auroran photo by Glenn Rodger**

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Residents of York Region and South Simcoe converged in Newmarket on September 13 for the Canadian Mental Health Association's Mental Health in Motion event, a key fundraiser for local mental health programs for youth.

The fundraiser, which was rebooted in 2026 after a year's hiatus, saw participants lace up for the cause, with registration fees waived to encourage maximum participation.

More than 250 people took part in the event, with each dollar going towards programs designed to meet York Region and South Simcoe youth where they are at.

This year's Mental Health in Motion was a first for Andrew Chung, CEO of the Canadian Mental Health Association of York Region and South Simcoe, who took over the role earlier this year. Going in, he said he didn't quite know what to expect from the event, but said it was a lot of fun, particularly with such strong

community support – including on-site participation from Newmarket-Aurora MPP Dawn Gallagher Murphy and Newmarket Mayor John Taylor.

"It was really nice to see local and community leadership who really care about the cause join us for the day," Chung says. "It's really important our community has the expert resources where we can meet young people where they are, where we don't claim to know their experiences, but we want to learn about them so we know how best to guide and support young people who are going through a wide range of challenges. Everybody needs to connect with somebody who can help guide them."

By press time this week, the 2026 Mental Health in Motion event had raised \$36,000 for local programs, but donations and fundraising pledges are still being collected. Anyone looking to help contribute to the final fundraising numbers are invited to do so at cmha-yr.on.ca/cmha-signature-events/mental-health-in-motion-2026 by the end of

the month.

"We've raised over \$36,000 and I think that's a really great sign and show of support from our community," says Chung. "When you're investing a dollar in CMHA's programs and services, it yields so much more than that. It means a person can find the right services and the right help when they need it. It means it can help them stay in school, help them stay connected to their families, and help equip them with fundamental skills, like self-advocacy, which they can take with them for the rest of their lives. That dollar that's invested into our young people, for example, can be lifelong and that's immeasurable. It yields dividends when people commit their funds to the CMHA and it also enables our organization to be able to respond to the greatest areas of need, and that can change over time. Donors and community members who entrust their funds with us really enable us to be able to respond to needs as they change, as quickly as we can."

"When donors provide us with

support to look for the greatest areas of need, it also goes to places like our Community Connections programs where we have drop-ins for anyone in the community. We meet them where they are and they can connect with one of our peer support workers or another one of our staff, whether it is just to talk about their day, or maybe they have a form that they need help filling out to access other supports, or maybe they're looking for housing supports.

"Our drop-in programs, particularly in the Aurora office, have grown so much and we oftentimes hit capacity. We never turn anyone away – we haven't had to do that yet – but this is really the magic that donors can help create when we're able to build capacity in programs like Community Connections."

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AURORA'S Municipal Election is on October 26, 2026

Learn more about candidates, voting options,
and key election resources at aurora.ca/Vote2026

Voting is easy, secure and convenient. Follow these steps to ensure you are informed and ready to cast your vote.

- ✓ **Check if you are on the Voters' List**
Visit aurora.ca/Voters by **October 1** to check, add, or update your elector information.
- ✓ **Know who's running for office**
Learn who is running for Mayor, Ward Councillor and School Board Trustee. View the full list of candidates at aurora.ca/Candidates.
- ✓ **Get your Voter Information Letter**
Voter Information Letters will be sent to all electors on the Voters' List in October. This Letter will have information you need to cast your vote.
- ✓ **Get out and vote!**
There are three easy ways to vote in Aurora's Municipal Election:
 - Vote online from **October 16 to 25**
 - Vote in the advance in-person polls from **October 17 to 21** at the Aurora Seniors' Centre, 90 John West Way.
 - Vote in-person on Election Day - **October 26** at your Assigned Voting Location.

aurora.ca/Vote2026



LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Region celebrates National Forests Week

On behalf of York Regional Council and The Regional Municipality of York, I am proud to recognize National Forest Week, taking place from September 20 to 26, 2026.

This year's theme, Forest Pathways: Innovation and Sustainability, highlights the importance of caring for our forests today while planning for their future.

York Region is fortunate to have the York Regional Forest, one of our most valued natural assets. Spanning more than 2,600 hectares across 22 public tracts, the Forest offers more than 150 kilometres of trails for residents to walk, hike, bike, explore and connect with nature.

Protecting and growing this natural resource is an important part of building a sustainable and resilient York Region. Through the York Regional Forest Management Plan and our Greening Strategy, we are working to protect woodland areas, expand the Forest and increase tree canopy across the Region.

National Forest Week is also an opportunity to experience the Forest firsthand. I encourage residents to explore a local trail, learn more about the plants and wildlife around us or take part in York Region's National Forest Week Festival on Saturday, September 26, 2026, at the Hollidge Tract in the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville.

Our forests are a legacy we have inherited and a responsibility we share. By caring for them today, we help to ensure they remain a vital part of York Region for generations to come.

Eric Jolliffe
York Region Chairman and CEO

Briefly

Council Candidate Answers: Zivka Kicic - Ward 6

An email issue prevented the last two rounds of Council Candidate questions from Ward 6's Zivka Kicic from appearing in our pages. Here are Kicic's answers to the four questions posed to all candidates in the last two editions of The Auroran:

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?

"In my view, the biggest thing Council can do is make Aurora as business-friendly and economically resilient as possible. We cannot control tariffs or trade negotiations, that is up to the federal government. But we can control what happens here in Aurora. We can reduce unnecessary red tape and municipal costs, make approvals more efficient, support local businesses, and make sure our infrastructure works for businesses that need to move people and goods. I see the impact of the economy in my own business. As a Realtor, when people are worried about their jobs or the economy, they hesitate to make one of the biggest decisions of their lives, buying a home. And when people stop buying homes, it affects more than real estate. It affects builders, contractors, lawyers, movers, furniture stores, tradespeople and many other local businesses. That is why I believe Council needs to listen to local businesses and understand what they are actually facing. Supporting businesses means supporting the local jobs and families that depend on them. To me, putting Aurora First means creating an environment where businesses can grow, people can feel confident about their future, and our local economy can stay strong, even when we cannot control what's happening outside Aurora."

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?

"I think we need to find the right balance. E-bikes and e-scooters are here to stay, and they can be a great way to get around Aurora, but safety has to come first. I'm open to licensing or registration if it actually improves safety and accountability, but I don't want to create unnecessary rules or costs for residents. Before moving forward, the Town should assess whether licensing would be enforceable, whether it would duplicate provincial or regional rules, and whether the benefits would justify the administrative burden. At the very least, we need clearer rules, better signage and education, and more enforcement where there are repeated safety concerns. The Town should clearly communicate the rules for e-bikes and e-scooters, including where they can be used, speed limits, helmet requirements and the need to yield to pedestrians. The Town should also work with York Regional Police and other partners on targeted education and enforcement, particularly in areas where unsafe riding or conflicts are being reported. We also need to make sure our sidewalks, trails and crossings are safe and keep up with how people are getting around. E-bikes and e-scooters can be a convenient and environmentally friendly way to get around Aurora, but their use must be responsible. Everyone, pedestrians, cyclists, drivers and e-scooter riders should be able to share Aurora's roads and public spaces safely. That's the kind of practical, balanced approach I would support."

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?

"I understand that cannabis legalization and retail regulations are largely determined by the federal and provincial governments, and that the Town has limited control over the number of stores operating in Aurora. That said, I believe we have too many cannabis shops for a community of our size. I have even had a resident tell me that if I could get rid of the pot shops, they would vote for me. While I know that removing existing stores may not be within a Councillor's authority, I believe residents' concerns should be taken seriously. If Aurora were deciding today whether to opt in or opt out of cannabis retail, I would vote to opt out. If elected, I would review what the Town can legally do, listen to residents' concerns about the impact on our community, and advocate for a balanced approach that reflects their wishes. Aurora is a relatively small community, and I believe we need to consider whether the number of cannabis retailers is appropriate for our population and neighbourhoods."

A number of steps have been taken over the last four years to bring more parkland and recreational opportunities into the municipal portfolio. What, in your view, are areas of opportunities for improvement in your respective Wards and Aurora as a whole?

"Ward 6 is fortunate to have beautiful natural spaces, including the David Tomlinson Nature Reserve. Now that the trail is complete, residents can truly enjoy its natural beauty and wildlife. Protecting and maintaining these spaces is important, but I believe Ward 6 also needs more cultural and civic opportunities. Our ward is growing quickly, yet it often feels like we are being treated as a construction zone rather than a community. New homes continue to be built, but investment in the people who live here seems to be missing. We do not even have a dedicated Aurora Public Library branch in Ward 6, only a self-service book machine. As a Councillor, I would work to bring more cultural events to this side of Aurora, such as concerts in the park and community activities. I would also advocate for exploring a library branch or other civic spaces in our growing ward. Growth should mean more than building houses. It should also mean building a stronger, more connected community."



Pullin' out the Ritz

As much as we'd like to walk 1.6 kilometers in someone else's shoes, they would be unlikely to fit! We should all know our shoe size (and possibly its European conversion) thanks primarily to the 1925 Brannock Device – that ubiquitous metal device that cups your heel and measures your foot's length and width. But before Charles Brannock unleashed his invention on the world of footwear, there was a solution patented by one Oliver Cornelius Ritz-Woller in 1916. The Ritz Stick, as they became known (this one here, 85.11.1, is branded by Aurora's own T. Sisman Shoe Company), would produce those same measurements, albeit only one at a time. It's convenient folding form factor made it popular with salesmen, although within a decade, Brannock's ergonomic invention would come along and shorten the measuring process considerably. Make sure to leave room for the toes, or you'll be back for another pair sooner than you'd like!



MP SANDRA COBENA'S UPDATE

Sandra Cobena, MP
Newmarket-Aurora

We can't afford to lose a single job in Newmarket-Aurora because we did not fight hard enough to keep it here during the tariff dispute.

Before serving as your Member of Parliament, I spent 15 years in commercial banking and learned that once a business leaves, those jobs are incredibly difficult to bring back.

I have heard from local businesses and manufacturers considering moving operations abroad or shutting down. I would rather fight to keep a job here today than spend the next ten years trying to bring it back.

If your business is being hurt by tariffs or you are worried about your job, I want to hear from you. I want to make sure you are getting every bit of support that is available and take what

you are experiencing to the House of Commons.

These businesses employ our neighbours, support families, sponsor kids' sports teams and give young people their first jobs. They make Newmarket-Aurora the community we love.

Many were already under pressure before this tariff dispute began. The

cost of doing business is too high. Taxes are too high. Housing is too expensive. Skilled workers are difficult to find.

The good news is: those are things we can change. And my promise to you is that I will fight for the jobs we have.

If your business is struggling, invite me in. Show me what is happening. Give me the facts I can take to Ottawa.

If you are a manufacturer in Newmarket-Aurora, join the roundtable I am co-hosting with the Central York and Aurora Chambers of Commerce on October 13 at 8:30 a.m.

My job is to fight for Newmarket-Aurora. Right now, that means fighting for your business and your job.

RSVP: sandra.cobena@parl.gc.ca.

CULTURALLY speaking

by Ashlyn Gregory

Aurora Cultural Centre

PERFORMING ARTS GALLERIES EDUCATION

Looking for something to do this weekend?

The Canadian Art Hop comes to Aurora and the surrounding area from September 24-27, shining a light on local galleries and creative spaces. Among the participating sites are Aurora Cultural Centre, Royal Rose Gallery, and Kingscraft Studio. Slightly farther afield, art hoppers can check out L.L. Contemporary in Richmond Hill or the Varley Art Gallery of Markham.

Be sure to pick up a Canadian Art Hop passport at participating sites! If you get at least 3 stamps, you can submit a photo of your passport to @canadianarthop on Instagram or email it to canadianarthop@ad-ac.ca for a chance to win a unique print by artist

Vick Naresh courtesy of Smokestack.

Enhance your Canadian Art Hop experience by participating in exciting programming at the Aurora Cultural Centre!

On Saturday, September 26 from 11:00am - 1:00pm, join us in the galleries for our Fall Artist-Poet Gathering, a popular quarterly meetup for artists and poets to create spontaneous written and visual responses to the artworks on display. The gathering ends with a 30-minute sharing session where participants can present the work they made. Please note: Only dry media is permitted in the gallery. No RSVP required.

From 1:00 - 3:30 pm in the Art Activity Room, explore contemporary

South Asian mirror embroidery with textile artist Khadija Aziz. In this FREE beginner-friendly workshop, students will learn about the origins of mirror embroidery while they decorate cloth with shimmering glass mirrors and beautiful thread. Reserve your spot on the Aurora Cultural Centre website!

On Sunday, September 27, join us before the galleries open from 10:00-11:00 am for a relaxing group yoga and sound bath session surrounded by contemporary art. Participants are required to bring their own mat and water bottle. Doors to the gallery open 30-minutes prior to the session start time. Tickets are available for purchase for \$25/participant on the Aurora Cultural Centre website.



Image courtesy of the Aurora Cultural Centre

AURORA VOTES 2026

Mayoral candidates consider options to increase recreation opportunities in Aurora

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Over the last decade, Aurora has pursued and realized many projects and initiatives to increase opportunities for recreation and sport within the community. Partnerships with local school boards and independent schools have resulted in new artificial turf fields, new opportunities for baseball have become a reality, and the Town now has three hotels in the Leslie Street

and Wellington Street corridor to accommodate visitors. This week, Mayoral candidates were asked what remains the most pressing or important piece when it comes to bringing parks, recreation, and sport opportunities to the community and, if elected on October 26, what they each would do to advance these projects. Here’s how they answered:

SHAWN DEANE – “Aurora is currently implementing its updated

Sport Plan (2025–2029), aligned with the Parks and Recreation Master Plan (2023) to strengthen local sport infrastructure and programming. The plan sets four priorities: Leadership & Development, Participant Experience, Community Sport Sustainability, and Sport Tourism. The plan also identifies several structural challenges. Aurora’s land base is finite, meaning future facility needs must be identified now — yet any land earmarked for recreation competes directly with provincial housing targets requiring 8,000 new homes by 2031. Financial pressures are also growing due to reduced Development Charges and lower cashinlieu of parkland contributions. These concerns intensified in August when the York Region District School Board announced significant increases to gymnasium rental fees following provincial funding reductions. Additional pressures include declining volunteerism, an aging population, affordability constraints, and a booking system that is not userfriendly and limits lastminute or block reservations. As Mayor, I would request an updated facility usage and capacity report to determine which assets are operating at or near their limits and to assess longterm returnoninvestment. I would also recommend that York Region Council explore the benefits of a regionwide facility booking system to improve access, coordination, and utilization across all neighbouring municipalities.”

JOHN GALLO – “Aurora has made significant investments in recreation and sport over the past decade. I believe the most important next step is ensuring those opportunities keep pace with our changing community and are accessible to residents of all ages and abilities. We need to identify where demand is outpacing what we currently provide, particularly for growing sports, youth activities, seniors and year-round recreation. That means listening to residents and local sport organizations and using participation and wait-list data to determine where additional fields, courts, facilities or programming are genuinely needed. I also believe we should continue improving our outdoor recreation network. Aurora’s extensive trail system was designed not only for recreation, but to connect neighbourhoods and destinations. Closing gaps and better connecting trails, parks and recreation facilities can expand opportunities without always requiring major new infrastructure. During the 2026-2030 term, I would focus on maximizing

existing facilities while planning future investments based on demonstrated community need and sound financial analysis. Our goal should be recreation opportunities that are accessible, affordable and available throughout our community.”

TOM MRAKAS – “Over the past eight years, we have turned commitments into investments in Aurora. From new sports fields, the ARC gymnasium, expanded parks and trails, and securing more than 28 acres of parkland, including a new four-acre park at George Street in Ward 2 and five acres on the Bloomington lands in Ward 4, our record is visible across this community. These investments bring people together and strengthen Aurora. The next chapter is about building on that success. A key priority is expanding affordable, year-round access to recreation, particularly indoor space, while maximizing the facilities we already have. I have advocated for shared-use agreements with school boards because school gyms and fields should serve the broader community outside school hours. Through the Mayor’s Roundtable of Sport, I will continue working directly with local organizations to identify needs and advance practical solutions. In the 2026–2030 term, I will pursue partnerships and funding opportunities, guide investments through responsible budgeting, and keep access for all ages and abilities at the centre of our decisions. I bring more than a vision for recreation. I bring eight years of achievement and a proven ability to deliver.”

YAFANG SHI – “According to the Parks & Recreation Master Plan (2023–2027), one of the goals identified in the 2015 Framework for Recreation in Canada, developed by a team led by the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association, is inclusion and access. Specifically, this goal addresses growing concerns over affordability, making recreation accessible for persons with disabilities, improving gender equity in sports, using parks and recreation to support Indigenous Truth and Reconciliation, and ensuring safe spaces for marginalized and displaced populations. Achieving this goal is vital to building an equitable, inclusive, healthy, and vibrant Aurora. If elected, I would work with the new Council to assess the progress that has been made in advancing these objectives through the Town’s parks and recreation infrastructure and programming, identify where further work is needed, and address those gaps.”



MP COBENA MANUFACTURING ROUNDTABLE

CO-HOSTED WITH
CENTRAL YORK CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
AND
AURORA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE.

OCTOBER 13TH

08:30-10:30AM

AURORA, ON

ARE YOU A LOCAL MANUFACTURER?
WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU.

RSVP:
sandra.cobena@parl.gc.ca



SANDRA COBENA
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT
NEWMARKET-AURORA



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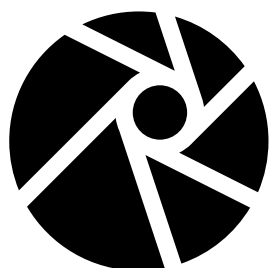
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BUSINESS & FINANCE



AURORA VOTES 2026

Council Candidates look at growth through their ward's lens

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Aurora is a growing community, but growth – and the opportunities for it – can mean very different things in the Town's six distinct Wards.

This week, Aurora's Council candidates were asked to identify the single most important or prevalent growth-related issue or challenge in their respective part of the community, and what each of them would do to address it.

Here's how they answered:

WARD 1

LAUREN HANNA – “Ensuring growth is well-planned and supported by required infrastructure is Ward 1's most important growth-related challenge. Aurora's Official Plan directs much of its growth to the Promenade along Yonge and Wellington Streets and the Major Transit Station Area (MTSA) around the GO station. These areas are targeted for growth because of proximity to transit and services, but adequate infrastructure and transitions to surrounding neighbourhoods are essential. Residents near Old Yonge Street and St. John's Sideroad have recently raised concerns about two approved developments, including traffic, pedestrian safety, neighbourhood fit and environmental impacts. Development should reflect the Official Plan and surrounding context, minimize environmental impacts, and provide appropriate density, built form and transitions. That is why I oppose the 161 Heathwood Heights development as proposed. If elected, I will push for clearer information on traffic and servicing impacts, support meaningful and ongoing resident engagement, and growth directed to areas where it can be appropriately accommodated.”

ROCCO MORSILLO – “I believe growth in Aurora is important, but it must be carefully planned, managed and balanced. This is especially important in Ward 1, where we have diverse housing, established neighbourhoods, and important environmental and heritage priorities. Aurora must respect its Official Plan and zoning bylaws. These documents represent our community's vision for how Aurora should grow and evolve. One of the biggest challenges facing Ward 1 is the role of the Ontario Land Tribunal (OLT) in planning appeals. I believe municipalities need stronger local authority so Council, Town staff and residents have a greater voice in determining how our communities grow. I will advocate for reforms that strengthen municipal authority, protect the integrity of Aurora's Official Plan and ensure residents have a meaningful voice in development decisions. I will also work with Council and advocate to the Province for meaningful changes to the OLT system, including minimizing its future role in municipal planning.”

WARD 2

ANGELA DAUST – “I have been asking residents this very question while canvassing. Overwhelmingly residents believe that infill projects are pushing the limits as to how many units are allowed, or the height of buildings, in relation to what currently exists in their neighbourhood. They believe that growth should be complementary to existing structures. Their view is that if an area is zoned for single family homes, then townhouses or apartments should not be considered, and zoning should not change to accommodate these proposals. They also feel that more of the budget should be allocated to infrastructure repair and replacement, so that new development doesn't place unnecessary

pressure on existing infrastructure. As a Councillor I would canvass the area around a proposed infill development to hear what the residents think of the project, and any concerns they have with it. I would also petition staff to have public open houses for residents in the area to speak to the developer to voice their concerns. Ultimately, I would act as an intermediary to help residents and developers come to a solution that is acceptable to both sides.”

MARCO DI GIROLAMO – “For me, the most important growth-related issue in Ward 2 is managing increased housing density while protecting neighbourhood standards and quality of life. Secondary suites and additional residential units can provide more housing options without requiring entirely new neighbourhoods, but they must be safe, properly registered and compatible with surrounding properties. Aurora's current rules require additional units to meet zoning, Building Code and other requirements, while the Town's Property Standards By-law establishes minimum standards for maintenance, safety and access. I would support responsible secondary suites while strengthening enforcement of property standards, ensuring complaints are addressed promptly, and improving communication with residents and homeowners. Growth should mean more housing opportunities without allowing overcrowding, neglected properties or unsafe living conditions. My approach would be to balance the need for housing with the responsibility to preserve the character, safety and livability of Ward 2.”

PHIONA DURRANT – “Determining our greatest challenge for growth requires authentic, bottom-up leadership, not assumptions. With approximately 12,000 residents in Ward 2, claiming to know their primary concern today would imply I have already spoken to over half of our community. The proper process of direct engagement must be led first through comprehensive surveys and many open town halls before pointing out our greatest challenge. However, one of my personal greatest challenges is the speed I witness on our streets in Ward 2 where I live; and I already have a petition going to address that! Again, being proactive! To jumpstart this proactive engagement, I would love to meet you all in person. I am hosting a community barbecue at my home this Friday to connect with residents directly. I don't wait around to get things done; I take action. I want to hear their unique concerns and experiences firsthand so we can shape the future of our ward together. Come grab a bite, share your thoughts, and help us build a cohesive, well-represented town from the ground up.”

BRYNN LANSDOWN – “For Ward 2, the key growth challenge is creating the right mix of housing while ensuring infrastructure and services can support it. Housing choice matters across generations. I have spoken with families whose children are leaving Aurora because they cannot find housing here, while some seniors want to downsize without leaving their community. I support thoughtful missing-middle housing, including fourplexes, townhouses and smaller apartments, when integrated into existing neighbourhoods. I have door-knocked on streets where fourplexes were created within the original home and, unless you knew, you might not realize it was four units. Growth must be matched with infrastructure. More homes mean greater demands on water, wastewater, roads, parks, libraries and services. As a Councillor, I would support appropriate zoning changes, implement Aurora's Affordable Housing Action Plan, coordinate growth with infrastructure planning, and work with York Region and senior governments to expand affordable and non-market housing.”

WARD 3

NIKKI ALBER – “I believe the most important growth-related challenge in Ward 3 is making sure that our established neighbourhoods and local businesses benefit from Aurora's growth. As newer areas develop, we cannot allow older parts of our community to be overlooked. For me, a top priority is revitalizing our Yonge Street corridor, particularly the corners of Yonge and Murray. Vacant storefronts and struggling businesses affect how our neighbourhoods look and feel, and whether residents can access

shops and services close to home. I would work with business owners, property owners and residents to identify barriers to filling vacant units and improving these properties. I would advocate for appropriate redevelopment that includes useful commercial space, safe pedestrian access, and careful consideration of traffic and parking. I would also support buy-local initiatives and help businesses access available resources.”

ALEXANDRA BONHAM – “To state that there is one prevalent growth-related issue or challenge facing a community is disingenuous in my opinion. Growth requires increased infrastructure, puts pressure on services, and requires access to strong public transportation while also maintaining greenspaces and character. However, let's talk about transportation. Growth on our major corridors is necessary, but increased populations bring increased vehicular congestion. I believe it is crucial that the Town works with YRT and Metrolinx to ensure access to public transportation is ubiquitous and that a range of new routes are added before development on our main corridors gets underway. New residents and buyers need to know they can rely on smooth and quick public transportation before they move, otherwise we continue to force car dependency and therefore increase congestion.”

ROBERT JAMES FRASER – “From a whole of Aurora perspective, I feel we have infrastructure issues to deal with, with traffic being a major issue. We have a choke point at Yonge and Wellington, with traffic backing up, flowing both north/south and east/west. It is a similar issue at Yonge & St. John's Sideroad. Looking at Ward 3 specifically, there really is no additional vacant land for development, outside of the infill that is taking place where the golf course used to be. What we are seeing in Ward 3 are existing homes being acquired, torn down and rebuilt with houses significantly larger than what was originally in the neighbourhood. This is changing the face of those neighbourhoods significantly and is something that needs to be addressed with zoning.”

HAROLD MacDONALD – “As Aurora grows, a specific growth-related issue would be meeting our Provincial target of an additional 8,000 housing units by 2031. During the process of this implementation, we as Council would advocate to retain the character and beauty of our established neighbourhoods. There are several requirements and legitimate concerns when approving new developments – such as door-to-door visits, traffic congestion, parking infrastructure, and water and sewer allocation, to schools, parks, trails, sports fields, and ice rinks, etc. I would make [the] opportunity for Ward 3 residents to have a voice before decisions are made, and closely monitor the growth and architectural control of each development project. We are all aware that Aurora will continue to grow – how we grow will make all the difference in keeping Aurora a desirable place to move to and live in.”

WARD 4

SHAHEEN MOLEDINA – “Historically, Aurora earned a reputation as a ‘no-town’ to developers, a community fiercely protective of its boundaries. But the reality today is that we need to build. The challenge we face isn't whether we grow, but how we grow. The single most critical issue facing Ward 4 is ensuring that new growth consists of tasteful, inclusive, and affordable development that respects our Official Plan (OP), rather than reckless density that erodes our identity. Growth cannot come at the expense of our environment or our neighborhood safety. Certain areas of Aurora require uncompromising attention because they sit directly on the Oak Ridges Moraine and our vital aquifer. We cannot allow developers to jeopardize our water systems, ignore our strict OP guidelines, or leave behind visual eye-sores and unsafe, bottlenecked entrances along major corridors like Yonge, Bayview, and Leslie. Thank you to Sandra Humfries, who stepped up and led the charge to finally secure the needed traffic light at Yonge Street and Butternut Ridge Trail here in Ward 4. The gateways to our subdivisions and our Town must remain grand, matching Aurora's beautiful history and unique style. For too long, passive Council oversight has

Continued on page 9

MARCO DI GIROLAMO

VOTE

WARD 2 COUNCILLOR

LEARN MORE!

MY PRIORITIES

Community Safety: Ensure the safety of our town and neighbourhoods is a top priority and Aurora remains a place where families, and future generations, can feel secure.

Managed Growth: Grow responsibly. Ensure new development is thoughtfully planned, comes with the necessary infrastructure, and is reflective of the neighbourhoods where it occurs.

Fiscal Responsibility: Tax dollars are your dollars. As a business owner, I understand the importance of setting and managing budgets. I will bring that same level of stewardship to council.

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Love 4 Dogs
Sheldon Stanleigh - RE/MAX
Swiss Chalet
Thrive Gymnastics
Westview Golf Club

AURORA VOTES 2026

From page 8

let developers push the boundaries of what is acceptable for Yonge and Calla. It is currently unsafe and an eyesore. As a small business owner, I believe in strict accountability. I will fight to ensure that any new development strictly adheres to the Official Plan, safeguards our precious ecological assets like the ORM, and guarantees proper, safe infrastructure for our residents. We can build a welcoming, affordable Aurora without selling out the character and environment that made us fall in love with this Town in the first place.”

MICHAEL THOMPSON – “The most significant growth-related challenge I see in Ward 4 is ensuring that development and intensification are appropriately managed and that the infrastructure and community amenities needed to support that growth keep pace. Growth will continue, but how and where that growth occurs matters. Residents are understandably concerned about increased density, building heights, traffic, parking and the impact new development can have on established neighbourhoods. We need to ensure any development is thoughtfully planned, appropriately located and compatible with the surrounding community. Earlier this year, I brought forward a motion for a focused planning study of the Yonge Street South Regional Corridor to establish clearer expectations around density, building heights, built form and transitions to surrounding neighbourhoods. But managing growth is about more than development applications. It also means ensuring the infrastructure and amenities residents need are there to support a growing population. I brought forward a motion to pursue additional parkland in Yonge Street South, an area identified as underserved by parks and playgrounds and previously pushed to move forward with the new gymnasium at the Aurora Recreation Complex to help address growing recreational needs. Transportation is equally important. I have supported and advocated for the multi-use path along Yonge Street, now under construction, and brought forward a motion asking York Region to accelerate the Highway 404/St. John’s Sideroad interchange in recognition of the increasing traffic pressures created by growth in Aurora and surrounding communities. These initiatives reflect the approach I believe we need to continue: plan growth carefully, ensure new development is appropriate for the area, anticipate its cumulative impact and make the infrastructure investments necessary to maintain the quality of life residents expect.”

WARD 5
JESSIE FRASER – “Key growth-related issues in Ward 5 relate to overdevelopment and intensification. There are real concerns related to development that places more residents into existing space: supporting infrastructure, transportation and traffic, schools and parks, environmental concerns. Development is necessary – to accommodate population growth and mobility, to ensure Aurora’s financial stability and economic health, and to manage sustainable infrastructure. But growth needs to be thoughtful and careful, balancing economic necessity with lifestyle and community. Currently, there are more than 30 community developments and infill projects under review in Aurora, many with resident pushback related to traffic and infrastructure strain. Current resident concerns deserve validation. I support growth

in areas where higher density makes sense – like the Wellington corridor and near the GO station here in Ward 5 – and believe higher density development should be concentrated to these areas. Intensification needs to respect and preserve the character of existing neighbourhoods; we need to balance the need for growth with responsible development that recognizes what makes Aurora unique.”

MILTON HART – “Growth should not simply mean more homes; it must mean complete, connected and sustainable neighbourhoods. I would push for development to be properly phased with roads, transit, sidewalks, cycling infrastructure, parks, trees, stormwater management and other municipal services. I would also ensure residents are meaningfully consulted early in the planning process, so that Ward 5 grows in a way that protects our quality of life while preparing Aurora for the future.”

HABINDER (BINDA) THANDI – “The biggest challenge with growth in Ward 5 is making sure our infrastructure keeps up. Residents shouldn’t have to deal with more traffic, congestion, and pressure on local services simply because our community is growing. I’m not against growth. Aurora is a great place to live, and naturally people want to be here. But growth needs to be responsible and well planned. That means making sure our roads, parks, trails, and community services grow with our population, while protecting the character of our neighbourhoods people already call home. As Councillor, I would make sure residents have a real voice in development decisions and push for infrastructure improvements before problems become worse, while ensuring we’re getting value for every tax dollar spent. Growth should make our community stronger, not make everyday life harder for the people already living here.”

TERRENCE ZHU – “For Ward 5, the biggest growth challenge is making sure infrastructure and services keep pace with development. Ward 5 already has significant development activity, including the approved redevelopment at 180 Wellington Street East, while other applications continue across the ward. I support growth, but growth needs a plan. Before adding more density, we need to look seriously at traffic, roads, parks, recreation, parking and the services residents depend on. As Councillor, I would push for infrastructure impacts to be considered alongside development decisions and for residents to be involved early, not after major decisions have already been made. Growth should add to the quality of life in Ward 5, not leave existing residents wondering whether the infrastructure can keep up.”

WARD 6
NICHOLAS KASHEF – “Ward 6 is where a lot of the new building in Aurora is going to be concentrated in the coming years. As such, an ever-present concern among residents is the traffic congestion that can come with new developments. The consensus among professional urban planners is that the biggest way to reliably make a dent in traffic congestion, long term is to give people viable alternatives to get where they need to go, outside of a car. That is why I keep bringing up the need for a network of bike paths in Aurora, even something as small as lighting up the David Tomlinson nature trails so they remain usable later in the evening can have a big impact on their usability not just for recreation, but transportation as well.”

ZIVKA KICIC – “Ward 6 is growing quickly, yet it often feels like we are being treated as a construction zone rather than a complete community. New homes continue to be built, but the services, amenities and community spaces that should come with that growth are not keeping pace. Culture and community programming is one example. Many Aurora events are concentrated around Town Square and downtown, where parking can be difficult. I would like to see more concerts in our parks and community events brought to Ward 6, where residents have easier access and parking is less of a challenge. Recreation capacity is another concern. As more families move here, parents are finding it increasingly difficult to register their children for programs such as swimming lessons because there simply are not enough spaces. We need recreation facilities and programs to keep pace with our

growing population. Ward 6 also does not have a dedicated Aurora Public Library branch. I would advocate for exploring a library branch or another civic space where residents can access programs, services, gathering space and cultural activities closer to home. As a Councillor, I would push for growth to be planned around the people who live here, not simply the number of houses being built. Growth should mean more than building homes. It should mean building a complete, connected community where residents have the services and amenities they need close to home.”

(Responses from the following candidates had not been received by press time: Reza Vaez Ghamsary (Ward 3), Charity Dela Cruz-Toupin (Ward 5), George Tremtsidis (Ward 5), Jibraan Khan (Ward 6), and Harold Kim (Ward 6))

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CAMPAIGN PRIORITIES

1. Affordability

The cost-of-living is a top concern for our federal and provincial governments - and Aurora must treat it the same way. Rising rent, fuel and food costs, higher unemployment, and persistent inflation have pushed our economy into uncertainty. Despite this, Aurora’s continues to fund **non-essential projects** instead of offering residents’ meaningful financial relief. This must **CHANGE**.

2. End Strong Mayor Powers

Aurora’s Mayor accepted Strong Mayor Powers (SMP) in 2023, along with a pledge to fast-track 8,000 new homes, by 2031. SMP also gave the Mayor control over the Budget, authority to advance Provincial priorities, and the ability to veto Council decisions, with only 3 of 7 votes.

Despite these extraordinary powers, Aurora has only built approximately 1% of their housing target and SMP have been misused to veto the majority of Council on four occasions creating unwelcomed tension inside Town Chambers. This must **CHANGE**.

3. Governance & Budget Reform

Aurora’s Council has steadily delegated more decision-making authority to Staff, to save time. As a result, Council has created a system where significant revenues are directed away from tax cuts and applied to the Capital Budget Authority without discussion or strong checks. Then these capital projects are approved in isolation without solid justification or consideration of the Town’s overall financial plan. This must **CHANGE**.

His plan for **CHANGE**

Rescind the use of Strong Mayor Powers and return the power to Council. Promote greater Town transparency and accountability, on all matters. Assign Council greater financial oversight to establish budget limits, for departments and projects. Implement new bylaws and best practices to enhance procurement and prioritize all projects while allowing for their cancellation, deferral, or phased completion. Establish “resident first” policies for the use of surpluses, savings and Reserve Fund balances. These steps will restore fiscal discipline and rebuild the public’s confidence in local government.

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Paid for by the campaign of Shawn Deane



Student’s donation increases accessibility, choice at Aurora Public Library

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

John Chlorakos is a regular patron at the Aurora Public Library.

An Oak Ridges resident who lives with cerebral palsy, Chlorakos is a big fan of audible books. Now, he’s paying it forward by donating more than \$1,000 worth of books from VOX Publishing to the Aurora Public Library (APL).

VOX publishes a wide array of children’s books for individual consumers and libraries alike. What sets them apart is just inside the cover of each volume is a button which reads the book aloud, allowing the reader to follow along.

They not only help consumers master the fine art of reading but increase accessibility for book lovers of all abilities.

The books are a hot commodity at APL and Victoria Dillon, the APL’s Manager of Collections and Access, says they’re hard to keep on their shelves.

“Parents love them, kids love them, every age loves them and they’re super, super popular,” she says. “The kids will read them over and over and over again, and we’re so happy John chose us for the project.”

The project in question came out of ways John, his family, and caregiver Aisha were exploring to help him collect 40 community service hours for his Ontario Secondary School Diploma. While this requirement is not compulsory for John, they were nonetheless keen to find ways for him to give back.



John Chlorakos is pictured at the Aurora Public Library (APL) on Monday afternoon, alongside Victoria Dillon, APL’s Manager of Collections and Access, and his donation of VOX Books.

Auroran photo by Brock Weir

They happened upon the Promise 1000 Foundation, which helps youth between the ages of 15 and 30 make meaningful contributions to their communities, providing funds to youth who “promise to make a positive difference” where they live. Since its inception in 2023, they have supported more than 300 projects across the GTA and other selected parts of Canada.

“Their funding is usually \$500, but because they don’t often have applicants who want to give back for accessibility reasons, they extended that for John for

\$1,000 as they wanted him to be able to donate 10 books to the Library,” Aisha explains. “As a kid, John always loved sound books, and he still loves sound books, so we thought it would be a great way to make things more accessible for children, youth, and whoever uses the Library.”

The donation of these sound books was music to the ears of Dillon and the APL team – and it wasn’t just the donation itself that warmed their hearts, but hearing of the impact APL has had on John himself.

“We can’t keep these books on the shelves – people want them, people request them, people say they want a certain one, or ‘My child struggles with communication,’ ‘My child struggles with socializing,’ and these books can help with all of those things,” says Dillon. “One of our main goals is early literacy education. We do that through programming. We do that through a lot of ways – you think books immediately, but there are other ways that early literacy happens, not just reading.

“A lot of it is verbalizing. A lot of it is talking through things, and now you have

a book that can read to you. Of course, we love when parents can read to their kids; obviously there is not only that social connection, but there’s bonding, but sometimes parents are busy, we get that. Handing this book to your child, that can happen independently, which also builds independent skills, and these are endlessly valuable products for us. They’re an excellent tool for literacy but also for fun – and it gets you away from a screen, which a lot of parents are also very interested in right now. It keeps them engaged in ways traditional books can’t.”

John’s donation of 10 books will soon hit Library shelves, and Dillon hopes they can find a way for his contributions to be marked inside each volume.

“This means everything,” says Aisha of John’s way of giving back. “It’s amazing that John can be recognized in the community as a contributor, because people with different disabilities are not always recognized in the community, so it’s great that he can be acknowledged and appreciated because he’s an amazing part of the community and we’re so grateful for all of this.”



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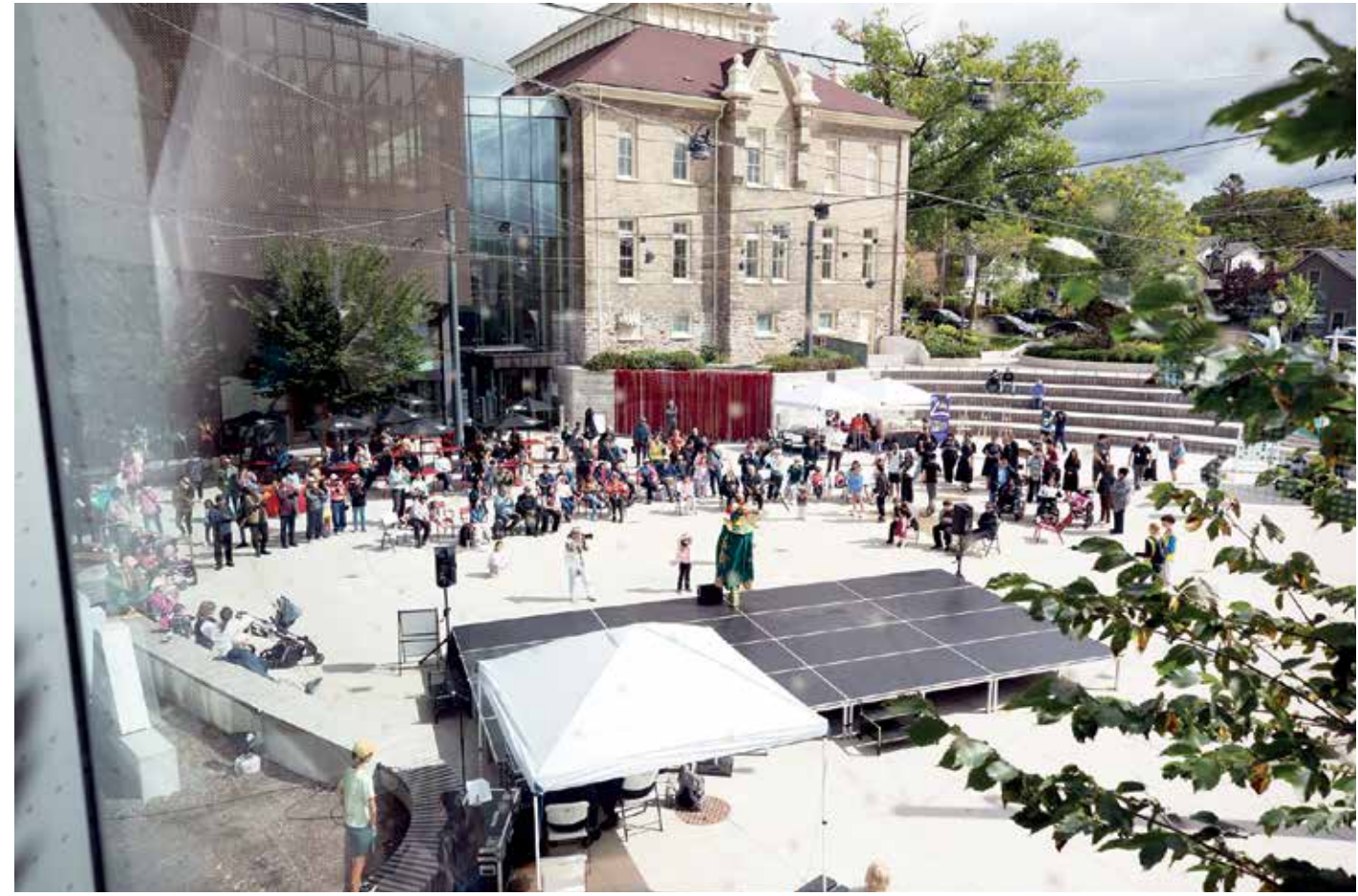
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Multicultural Magic



On Saturday, the Town of Aurora hosted its Multicultural Festival at Aurora Town Park and Aurora Town Square, bringing out scores of residents for music, dance, and textile showcases, outdoor art installations, a chance to sample corn in several different international ways, and much more. (Top Left, Fourth Row) Brazilian dancers entertained crowds at Aurora Town Park, and interacted with attendees before the fun shifted to Aurora Town Square. (Top Right) Aurora Town Square is the scene of Common Threads: Aurora Public Art Festival, which runs through September 27. Andy and Ava were on hand to take in the installations, which have been created by Khadija Aziz, Yifu Ding and Zishuo Li, and Roda Medhat. (Second Row) Cultural performances continued in Aurora Town Square. (Third Row) Janice, Jolie and Joven participated in workshops inside. (Fifth Row) Yel, Christine, Chen, and Eupin. (Sixth Row) Mei and Hong. (Bottom Row) Val and George sampled some corn, grilled up by the Optimist Club of Aurora, with seasonings representing multiple cultures from around the world. Antonio, Hugo, Luz, and Hugo.

Auroran photos by Glenn Rodger



Mayoral candidates talk tourism as Aurora looks to be a draw

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Aurora has often been promoted as a great community to work, play, and raise a family – but, over the last 10 years, significant strides have been made to make the community a destination for people throughout the GTA and beyond.

With three hotels now operating in the southeast quadrant of Leslie Street and Wellington Street East, there are more opportunities than ever before to welcome short-term and long-term visitors.

This week, Aurora’s four Mayoral candidates share their views on how to capitalize on these efforts, being asked, “What more can Aurora do to increase tourism into the community? What are

some opportunities (future or missed) that you would like to explore?”

Here is how they answered:

SHAWN DEANE – “Aurora’s current tourism and economic development efforts are strong, and I believe the Town is on the right track. As Mayor, I would continue to promote and refine existing resources such as ExploreAurora.ca, the Sport Tourism Package, the York Region Tourism Fund, the Chamber of Commerce, and our Economic Development Corporation. Local tourism has also benefited from new hospitality infrastructure in recent years, including additional hotels and a new theatre. Our Economic Development staff already assist event organizers by connecting them with these resources and available facilities, and I would encourage them to keep looking ahead for new opportunities. This includes developing creative marketing programs that reflect emerging trends within community organizations, while remaining mindful of competing events in neighbouring municipalities—such as the recent Markham Indy. Finally, during these recessionary times, the Town must be especially attentive to the return on investment from its advertising budget. I would request a formal review to ensure that our promotional spending remains balanced, effective, and fiscally responsible.”

JOHN GALLO – “Aurora has many of the ingredients for a stronger tourism economy, but we need to do a better job of connecting and promoting them. Our historic downtown, cultural facilities, trails, parks, restaurants, festivals, sporting events and community events can become part of a more coordinated strategy that gives people a reason not only to visit Aurora, but to stay, eat, shop and explore. I would like to see us build stronger partnerships with local businesses and community organizations and develop more destination events that attract visitors from across York Region and beyond. Sport tourism is another opportunity. When families come to Aurora for tournaments and competitions, we should be connecting those visitors with our restaurants, shops and other attractions. I also believe our trails and natural assets are underutilized as tourism opportunities. Aurora has an extensive trail system that can be promoted as part of a broader cycling, walking and outdoor experience. Tourism doesn’t always require building something new. Sometimes it means taking what we already have, connecting it better, marketing it effectively and giving visitors a reason to come back.”

TOM MRAKAS – “Aurora is in a strong position, and I don’t think residents always realize it. Our Visitor Growth Plan, built with Central Counties Tourism, found that our restaurants, shopping and sports

facilities are already drawing visitors from outside Town — an asset we haven’t fully leveraged yet. Sport tourism is a real opportunity: our Sport Tourism Strategy has already brought events like international hockey matchups to the Aurora Community Centre, filling hotels and restaurants for a weekend at a time, and I want to keep bringing more tournaments and marquee events to Town. Arts and culture tourism is also starting to pick up, with Town Square becoming the destination we always knew it could be — theatre, charity events, movie screenings, even films being shot on location here. That’s exactly the kind of momentum we’re going to keep pursuing aggressively. We already have proven draws that bring people in from across the region every year: RibFest, Saturday Night Fever, the Chamber Street Festival, Concerts in the Park, our Haunted Forest, the Christmas Market, Santa Under the Stars, and our Canada Day parade and festivities. We’ll be looking at adding more events that build on that success, along with a signature culinary festival concept staff have been exploring. I want the Visitor Growth Plan’s framework to translate into real wins: better wayfinding, stronger Chamber partnerships, and metrics that track visitor length of stay. Tourism dollars spent here support Aurora businesses directly.”

YAFANG SHI – “Aurora Town Square is intended to be the centerpiece of the downtown revitalization initiative. The Aurora Public Library is fully funded by the Town, with two Councillors serving on its board. The Aurora Cultural Centre is substantially funded by the Town, with two Councillors also serving on its board. Both institutions are facing human rights proceedings before the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario following the censorship of work by racialized women artists. Aurora should build a vibrant cultural hub that becomes the soul of its downtown and supports local tourism. The Town and its institutions must respect and comply with the Ontario Human Rights Code. Meanwhile, residents in the surrounding neighbourhood are adversely affected by a commercial restaurant operating inside the heritage Aurora Armoury, with one resident describing the impact as a ‘nightmare.’ The Town should preserve heritage buildings and prioritize community uses. Mississauga, for example, preserved the Small Arms Inspection Building and transformed it into an arts and culture hub. Aurora could learn from this model. Concerns about the Aurora Armoury should guide future heritage decisions, including those regarding Victoria Hall. Aurora’s heritage buildings are valuable community assets and could play a greater role in our tourism strategy.”

(Editor’s Note: The case regarding the Aurora Public Library was launched by Shi, following a photography exhibition hosted at APL in 2023.)



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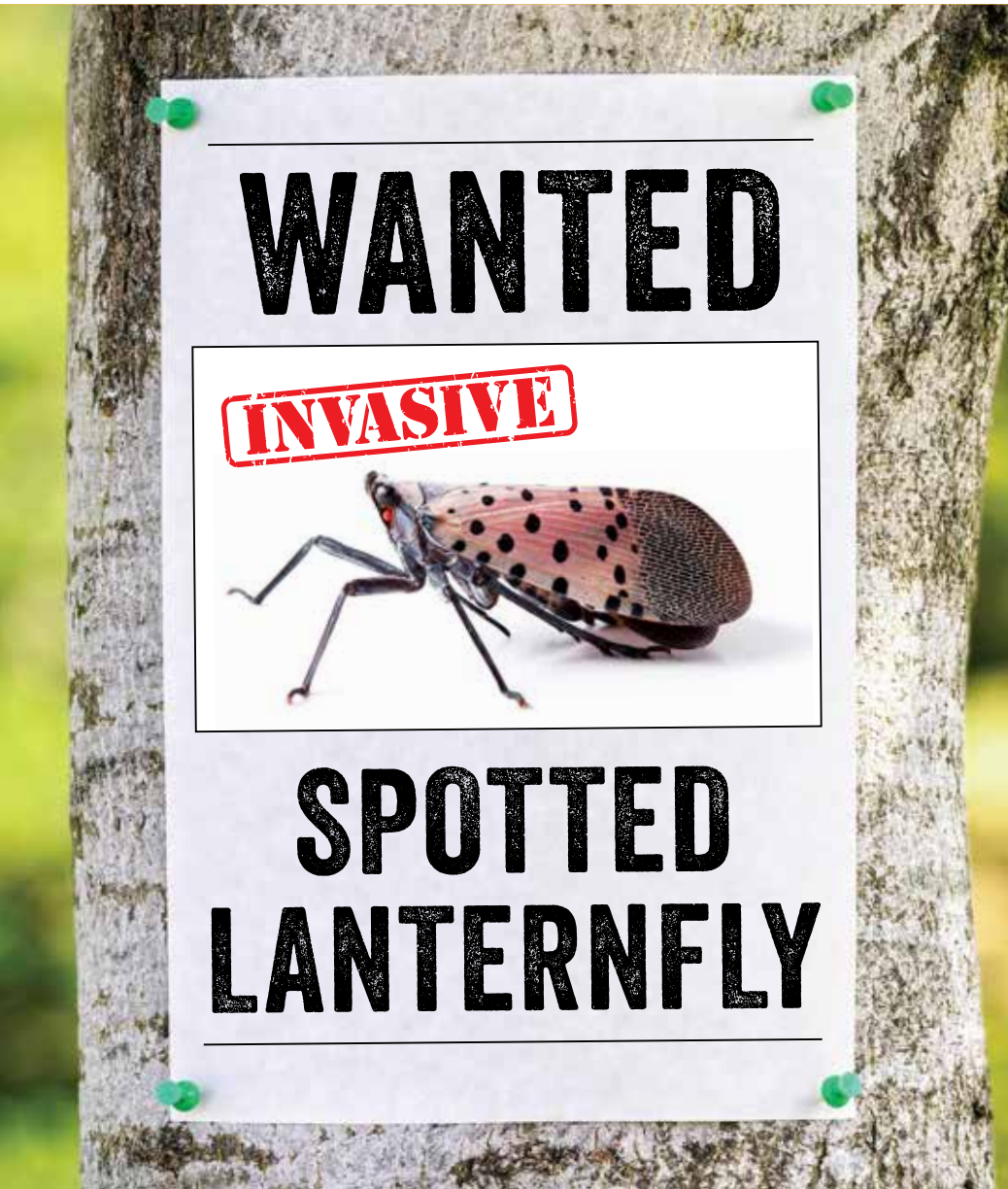


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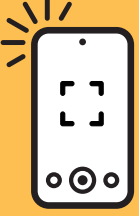
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(Left) Attendees were greeted at the door with a decidedly East Coast theme by Catherine, Ian and Bryson. (Right) The Flailing Shillelghs were amongst the evening’s entertainment. **Auroran photos by Glenn Rodger**

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Renay Partridge started to struggle with her mental health at the age of 17. Pregnant with her son William, life came at the Grade 12 student fast. She was determined to graduate at the end of the year, all the while adjusting to significant changes in her life.

While she graduated with good marks and she and William’s father settled into their new rhythm of life, she found it hard to regulate her emotions – and turned to alcohol at the age of 20.

Partridge shared her story of addiction, recovery and sobriety, and parlaying her experiences into a successful local business with area residents on Thursday night as the Salvation Army’s Northridge Community Church held its annual East Coast “shindig”, Harbour of Hope, to support its mental health programs.

The founder of On the Wagon

Mocktails, Partridge was a keynote speaker at the event, which was an all hands on deck affair, with some elements of the catering being done by Salvation Army clients, Newfoundland cod freshly caught by Northridge pastor Captain Fred Reid and his family, and a signature mocktail – “Sally’s Passion,” a nod to the Salvation Army’s nickname of “Sally Ann” – concocted by Partridge.

“I never really had the chance to learn how to be an adult in stages; I was thrown into it,” she shared with the audience. “I had severe postpartum depression and anxiety, and that was really the beginning of what became a very long battle with my mental health. For years I was trying to get better. I went in to the hospital more times than I can remember. I saw psychiatrists, I was put on medication, I was given different diagnoses. I spent months, if not years, on a waiting list for copies of behavioural therapy and dialectal behavioural therapy, and the hospital won’t admit you unless you are a harm

to yourself or others. So, eventually I told them I was going to hurt myself so I could get some help.

“I tried everything. But even with all of that, there was still something I was missing. I didn’t have the tools to cope with life or what was happening inside my head. I couldn’t regulate my emotions. I couldn’t handle anything difficult. Sometimes I couldn’t get out of bed. Other times, I couldn’t sleep at all. I constantly felt like something terrible was about to happen. I stopped working in 2007, and I didn’t work again until 2020. Then, when I was 20, alcohol came into my life.”

At first, Partridge said she felt like there was nothing else she was able to do.

Alcohol “clouded and quieted my mind” and she found a way to relax, socialize, and have fun. But, she found, alcohol didn’t make her depression go away; rather, it made her not care she was depressed.

“For somebody who had spent years desperately trying to get away

from constantly suffering, I finally felt relief until it stopped working,” she said. “Eventually, I became physically, mentally, and emotionally dependent on alcohol and alcohol didn’t just destroy my life, it destroyed me mentally, socially, and it oftentimes turned me into a very angry person. By the end, I was morally, emotionally, and physically bankrupt.”

But there was light at the end of the story.

She and her fiancé Ian have been together for 14 years. He was at her side as she rebuilt her life, found her sobriety, and learned how to live again.

“Once I was sober, I also started to realize just how big of a role alcohol had been playing on my mental health. Alcohol had given me temporary relief from my anxiety and depression, but once I wasn’t drinking anymore, I could finally see how much worse it had actually been making everything. I was also taking medication for my mental health while I was drinking,

Continued on page 15

A photograph of a worker wearing an orange long-sleeved shirt, green pants, and a white hard hat. The worker is using a chainsaw to cut a large log. The log is lying on the ground, and the worker is positioned on the left side of the log. The background shows a residential area with a house and a lawn.

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soul – in the name of mental health

From page 14

and alcohol was working against the very treatment that was supposed to be helping me. There’s a reason so many mental health medications tell you to avoid alcohol. Once I stopped drinking, my medication started working, but medication isn’t going to fix everything either, so I had a lot of learning to do. I had to learn how to recognize what I was feeling instead of immediately reacting to it. I had to learn what I could control and what I couldn’t, and I had to learn how to ask for help. But I also had to figure out who I was.

“For so many years, my identity had been wrapped up in mental health and then substance use. Once those things weren’t controlling every part of my life anymore, I had to learn who I was, and I had to decide who I wanted to be. That took time. Today, I’m very self-aware. If I notice myself getting irritated or overwhelmed, I can usually stop for a second and ask myself what’s actually going on. Am I exhausted? Am I hungry? Am I in pain? Is there something bothering me that I need to talk about? Do I need time alone? Do I need to get out of the house? I have two rules now. And things might sound really simple to somebody else, but when you spend years feeling completely controlled by your emotions, learning that you can actually understand when you respond to them differently is huge.... I obviously can’t know what my life would have looked like if I had accessed more of these kinds of supports when I was younger, but I do wonder. If somebody had helped me learn these tools earlier, would I have spent so many years suffering? Would things have gone as far as they did?

Maybe they wouldn’t have. But at the same time, I also know that I wouldn’t be the person standing here today if I hadn’t [gone] through everything I did.

“I wouldn’t wish those years on anybody, but I also wouldn’t erase them because they shaped me into the person I am today. Mental health wasn’t talked about when I was growing up the way it is now, so seeing more support available, and especially seeing more attention being put on young people is incredibly important because maybe our kids don’t have to struggle the way I did. Maybe they can get support and learn some of these things before they spend years believing that feeling completely overwhelmed by life is just what life is, and you’re weak because you can’t figure it out.”

As she attained her sobriety she said she rediscovered her zest for life. She started going to concerts and events, having what she described as “real, genuine fun” and she happened upon the idea providing liquid alternatives for those out on the town.

She began with vendor markets, eventually applying for grants pertaining to start-up companies, winning a grant she describes as “very competitive.”

“Sometimes I really do have to stop and think about how different my life looks today,” she says. “I didn’t work for 13 years and now I’ve built my own business. On the Wagon Mocktails is about much more than being a mocktail – it’s about creating an experience where people can celebrate, connect, feel included and have fun without alcohol. People don’t drink for all kinds of reasons. Maybe they’re sober, maybe they’re pregnant, maybe they’re taking

medication, maybe they’re driving, maybe they simply don’t want to drink and whatever their reason is, it’s nobody else’s business. You shouldn’t have to explain yourself. You shouldn’t have to feel like an afterthought when you’re not drinking.

“My life looks completely different today than it did back then, but I don’t want that to sound like everything is perfect now because it isn’t. I still experience depression. Anxiety is still very present in my life. I still get overwhelmed. I still have bad days. The difference is that today, I know I can get through it. I know I recognize when something is wrong. I know when to engage the tools I’ve learned, when I need to talk to somebody, when I need help, and when I just need to give myself a little bit of time. And sometimes I’m not okay, and that’s okay. Maybe a

17-year-old girl who feels completely overwhelmed in her life can get help before she loses herself. Maybe a mother doesn’t have to prepare herself for the possibility that her child isn’t going to survive. Maybe somebody can learn that asking for help is okay, that feelings pass, and that there are tools they can use, and that life that they have right now does not have to be the life they have forever, because if I could somehow go back and show a 17-year-old me, the woman standing here today, I wouldn’t have believed it. I wouldn’t have believed that I would go back to work. I wouldn’t have believed that I would build a business, and I definitely wouldn’t have believed that one day I would stand in front of a room full of people....and I have a life today that I generally could not have imagined back then.”



Renay Partridge, founder of On The Wagon Mocktails, was one of the evening's keynote speakers, underscoring the need for mental health resources in the community. **Auroran photo by Glenn Rodger**





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Councillors shouldn’t attend conferences on taxpayer dime in election year: motion

Decision on conference budget could be made by incoming Council

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Council members should not be able to attend conferences on the taxpayer’s dime in an election year, according to a motion from Ward 3 Councillor Wendy Gaertner.

Councillor Gaertner’s motion, which was reviewed by local lawmakers at the Committee level earlier this month, is set to be discussed by Council this week.

While the Councillor says that conferences “provide valuable education for future political work” and provide “future benefit to the residents,” elected members should not be able to fund their attendance through municipal coffers in an election year.

Should the Councillor’s motion be approved by Council this week, municipal staff will be tasked with reviewing existing policies and report back to the Council set to be elected on October 26 with their recommendations on “ensuring the appropriate use of taxpayers’ money.”

Ward 2 Councillor Rachel Gilliland, who is not seeking re-election in Aurora this fall, offered a different perspective. She said, in her view, attending these conferences is part of a Council member’s job, and whether or not they are seeking re-election, they have a job to do until their term comes to an end.

“Conferences are an essential part of growth for the Town in general,” said Gilliland at this month’s Committee of the Whole meeting, adding that not only is the value of conferences reflected in Councillor Gaertner’s motion, elected members need to

commit their attendance months in advance when their decision whether or not to run may not be made.

“I know, Councillor Gaertner, you haven’t attended any of these conferences at least in the eight years I have sat beside you, but it’s not unusual at all for Council members to have organized delegations with Members of Parliament, Members of Provincial Parliament, in order to facilitate conversations and advocate for the Town for current things that are happening. So, while I understand the motion, and in light of the motion, at the end of the day you are still a member of Council doing work for the Town that you are representing.”

Other Council members said they appreciated Councillor Gaertner’s perspective, but said there were other angles to consider.

“I think over the years we’ve heard questions about the fact that the policy doesn’t speak to how many Councillors can go at one time to a conference. There’s been questions raised about whether the amount should be allocated per Councillor or should it stay being that pool of funds that everybody can draw from,” said Ward 4 Councillor Michael Thompson. “There’s different questions and aspects that have been brought up for years, so if you’re going to make recommendations for the next Council, I would say, just take a look at the policy in whole and make whatever changes or suggestions you want to do.”

Councillor Gaertner said she agreed with that, and similar sentiments were offered by Ward 6 Councillor Harold Kim.

“I understand that some constituents

may consider that in the last year of a term there may be Councillors who attend conferences and decide not to run again. The optics of that is, ‘Well, why are we spending money on someone who may not run again?’ If that’s the intention or one of the ‘loopholes,’ then one of the suggestions I might add is perhaps have the Councillor pay for the conference and if that person runs, after the result of the elections, regardless of what the result is, the Town either reimburses or the Town pays for it – and if the Councillor does not run again, then reimburses at the end,” said Councillor Kim. “I think that would solve some of the concerns that some constituents may have, but I think all of these come into play. I’m happy with deferring this to staff and having an all-encompassing review of this, but I think that’s one of the options that I can foresee when a report comes out.”

Although Councillor Gilliland said she did not attend this summer’s AMO (Association of Municipalities of Ontario) Conference, she said the value of the event was clear.

“If you are registering for something in February and you’re doing something for the greater good of the Town because you are educating yourself, and you are going and you’re delegating on behalf of your community to advocate for something, you’re still doing your job as a Councillor. You are still elected to do your job within the year that you’re doing. It doesn’t mean you just drop everything.

“Maybe there’s some people who believe that conferences just aren’t as valuable as they are, but the reality is they’re very valuable. For me personally, I’ve taken away a lot of great information, I’ve handed over to staff, I try to be educational about it. Now we’re doing reports. But if this is something for the next Council, they want to review the policy by all means, but I feel like there’s a little bit of tit for tat going on right now, and I’m not going to get involved or dragged into this. I really do believe that conferences are a very educational piece, not just on a provincial level, but also on the federal level, from my own experience. I never regret any of the ones that I’ve done, because they’ve all been very resourceful.”

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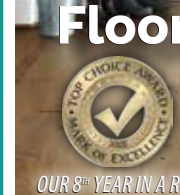
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Junior Tigers’ Max Skinner fires five goals to pace dramatic road victories in Newmarket and Toronto



Tigers power forward Sheamus Gunn (88) celebrates his third period goal amid a trio of dejected Newmarket Hurricanes on Saturday night at the Ray Twinney Complex. Aurora beat Newmarket 3 – 1 to capture Round 2 of the Battle of Yonge Street.

Aurora photo by Jim Stewart

BY JIM STEWART

The Aurora Junior Tigers completed a dramatic road trip sweep on the weekend and left winger Max Skinner led the way.

Skinner scored two goals, including the game winner, on Saturday night as the resurgent Tigers edged the Hurricanes 3-1 in Newmarket.

On Sunday afternoon at the Scotiabank Pond in Downsview, Skinner’s hat trick paced Aurora’s attack and leading scorer Javian Nei added two goals including the OT winner in the Tigers’ narrow 7-6 victory over the Toronto Warriors.

The wins improved the Tigers’ record to 2-5-0-0 and moved the improving squad into 9th place in the OJHL East standings.

On Saturday night at the Ray Twinney Recreation Complex, the Tigers were looking to avenge their season-opening 4-2 home ice loss to the Hurricanes in Round One of the Battle of Yonge Street.

The visitors got the upper hand at 4:44 of the first period when Skinner received a crisp pass from power play partner Sheamus Gunn and rifled a wrist shot from between the circles that beat Hurricanes’ netminder Alex Armellin cleanly.

The chemistry between Skinner, Gunn, and Captain Anrijs Bundzenieks was evident all game as the trio finished checks, forechecked like demons, and

finished scoring opportunities.

The big line clicked again at even strength just 1:23 into the second period. Bundzenieks threaded a perfect pass through a maze of players from the right wing on to Skinner’s tape on the door step. The left winger snapped the puck high blocker side past Armellin to put the white-clad visitors up 2-0 and praised the feed provided by the Tigers captain.

“It was a great pass by Anrijs. He has such great vision and great hands to find me back door behind the defense. It was an unreal play by him.”

Skinner described the on-ice chemistry developing between the robust trio: “We trust what the coaching staff is doing with line combinations and we’re definitely creating trust on the ice. I couldn’t have got those two goals tonight without my linemates. Our practices are setting a great tone for the team and we’ve been busy building each other up.”

While Skinner and his linemates were supplying timely offense, Aurora netminder Lucas Carpino was sensational between the pipes—repelling breakaways, point blank shots, and numerous 2-on-1 rushes to bail out his teammates’ defensive miscues.

Skinner praised Carpino’s performance: “He was phenomenal tonight. He’s an amazing goalie and he’s had some big games for us this season. We were glad to score goals for him tonight. We trust him. Every save

he made picked up the team and proved what a Grade A goaltender he is.”

Although the Hurricanes slipped one by Carpino when Georgi Garimov redirected Liam McMullin’s right point shot into the lower left corner of the net at 14:22 of the second period, it was the only puck to elude the acrobatic Tigers’ tender.

Despite some defensive lapses, which compelled Carpino to flash the leather and protect his club’s precarious 2-1 lead early in the final frame, the Tigers delivered the knockout punch at 5:01.

After some ferocious forechecking by the visitors led to a goalmouth scramble in front of the Newmarket net, Skinner created a turnover, Nei feathered a sweet feed to Gunn, and the towering right winger blasted the puck past Armellin to give the Tigers a two-goal cushion.

Down the stretch, Gunn’s maniacal forechecking and dragging of the puck along the boards frustrated the living daylights out of the Hurricane defenders.

The Tigers fended off a protracted 6-on-5 for over ninety seconds after Armellin was lifted for an extra attacker.

Skinner, Gunn, and Bundzenieks were on the ice for most of those game-deciding moments, but Skinner chose to highlight the gritty play of OJHL veteran Nic Ferrante versus the Hurricanes who joined the trio for the final defensive stand.

“Nic showed his hard work all game. He showed it on the power play and on the penalty kill. He drew three penalties at key points of the game. He was getting tripped and boarded, but he just kept working for us. He’s an

important leader on the ice and in the room.”

After complimenting his teammates and coaching staff after winning Round Two of the Battle of Yonge Street on Saturday night, Skinner continued his red-hot play on Sunday afternoon. His hat-trick helped propel the Tigers to a wild OT win over the Warriors in Downsview and establish Aurora’s first winning streak of the season.

The speedy, hard-hitting left winger opened the scoring at 6:27 of the first period, gave the Tigers a 4-2 lead 2:47 into the second frame, and put Aurora ahead 5-3 three minutes into the final frame. It was, indeed, a shootout at Scotiabank and the Tigers turned in their best offensive performance of the young OJHL season.

After Danil Kolzin staked Aurora to a commanding 6-3 lead at 11:25 of the third period, the Warriors replied with goals by Zachary Anderson, former Tiger Marcus Carter, and Henry Wang to deadlock the contest and sent it to overtime.

Nei played OT hero 54 seconds into the extra period when he beat Warriors goaltender Cameron Hallett with his second goal of the contest. Skinner and Nick Frasca earned assists on Nei’s GWG as the resurgent Junior Tigers completed a weekend sweep of Newmarket and Toronto.

Gunn continued his hot hand, too, versus Toronto—earning three assists after a productive night in Newmarket.

The Junior Tigers put their two-game winning streak on the line when they host the Stouffville Spirit on Friday, October 2. Puck drop at the ACC will be 7 p.m.

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YORK STARS RHYTHMIC GYMNASTICS CLUB



Kirsten Wong– Level 3A Provincial Champion - Kirsten delivered an outstanding performance in the Level 3A Provincial category! She captured 1st place in Hoop and 6th place in Free, earning an impressive overall score of 31.950 to claim the Provincial All-Around Champion for Level 3A. Congratulations on a fantastic competition!

Athena Fu – Level 4A Provincial Champion - Athena had a dominant competition in the Level 4A Provincial division, taking 1st place in both Free and Ball to secure 1st in Overall as well, with a remarkable total score of 37.450. She finished an incredible 2.65 points ahead of second place, showcasing her consistency and excellence throughout the competition. Amazing work, Athena!

Chantal Chen – Junior High Performance - Chantal had an exceptional showing in the Junior High Performance division! After placing 7th overall in qualifications, she earned a coveted spot on Team Canada. She then climbed to 5th overall in the finals, highlighted by a bronze medal

in Clubs, 4th in Hoop, 6th in Ribbon, and 11th in Ball. Congratulations on an incredible achievement representing York Stars!

Isabella Zhang – Junior High Performance - Isabella delivered a strong performance throughout the Junior High Performance competition. She finished 4th overall in qualifications, securing her place on Team Canada. In the finals, Isabella placed 7th overall, with standout finishes of bronze in Ribbon, 6th in Ball and Clubs, and 10th in Hoop. A fantastic accomplishment and a wonderful representation of York Stars!

Alliya Cronin – Senior High Performance - Alliya competed with confidence in the Senior High Performance division, finishing 8th overall in the qualification round to earn her place on Team Canada. She maintained that position in the finals, placing 8th overall, with event finishes of 7th in Ribbon, 8th in Hoop, and 11th in Ball and Clubs. Congratulations on an outstanding competition and representing Canada on the national stage!

SMK Mustang Ezra Selvarajah defends 5K title at 3rd Annual Schomberg Mug Run

BY JIM STEWART

More than 160 participants competed in the 3rd Annual Schomberg Mug Run in cool mid-September conditions on Saturday afternoon.

Defending champ Ezra Selvarajah captured the Men’s side of the competition—crossing the Fairgrounds finish line with the best overall time of 18:42:82. The Grade 9 student at St. Maximilian Kolbe CHS in Aurora described the factors that enabled him to defend his Mug Run title: “Having faith in God—and lots of running. My mom, Emina, and my dad, Sujan, drive me to all my practices and meets, and pay for my shoes, too.”

The appreciative fourteen-year-old was pleased with his performance at the 2026 Mug Run 5K race, but has set his sights on the upcoming YRAA Cross Country season as well as the Spring Track and Field season during which he’ll compete as a SMK Mustang.

“My goal is to run Cross Country at Max this year, train over the Winter with the Newmarket Huskies Track Club, and run high school track in the Spring—most likely the 800-meter and 1500-meter races. I like to run the 800-meter race most of all.”

Second place finisher Alex James crossed the finish line at 19:13:54, edging bronze medalist Zachary Brown (19:16:85) by three seconds.

King-Vaughan MP Anna Roberts presented podium finishers in both 5K divisions with championship belts and a bouquet of flowers. The medal winners displayed their spoils of victory from the podium much to the delight of those assembled in the Beer Garden.

Meredith Risk captured the Women’s division—completing the scenic 5K route in 21:29:70 and finishing sixth overall. Jocelyn Van Halteren (24:24:08) finished second in the division and placed 18th overall.

Elisa Gorniak (24:58:03) came in third in the division and placed 20th overall of the 160 competitors who trotted across the terrain on a cool Saturday afternoon.

The event opened with Max Marshall’s muscular electric guitar version of “O Canada”—quite in keeping with the “Elbows Up” zeitgeist. Event organizer Ryan Raymond strode to the start line at the north end of the Fairgrounds. Microphone in hand, the President of SURGE Activewear impelled the intrepid group onward to take on the arduous, hilly 5K course through Schomberg.

Upon delivering the go signal to the 160 runners, Raymond—who also serves as the President of the King Chamber of Commerce—jumped aboard an ATV at the north Fairground gates and joined event staff supervising the race route.

Back at the rustic Fairgrounds, live music was presented by Marshall who summarized the Mug Run succinctly as “a perfect event featuring great food, great music, centred around a great sporting event with tolerable weather.”

The weather was tolerable, indeed, with the unseasonably cool temperatures ideal for a 5K race. The fresh air was filled with the aroma of smash burgers being grilled by the local Lions Club which blended nicely with Marshall’s songs to imbue the venerable corral and post-race beer garden with a late summer festival vibe.

The \$17 Lions Club Smash Burger combo included a delectable double burger smothered in cheese and all the fixings, a bag of chips, and in keeping with the spirit of the festival, I enjoyed an obligatory can of MUG Root Beer to cap off the culinary experience at a picnic table while the winners of the divisional races were being determined.

Proceeds from the 5K event were donated to the King Township Food Bank.

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AND THEY'RE OFF – Dozens of residents came out to the Aurora Community Arboretum on Sunday for the annual Terry Fox Run. Photo courtesy of Mayor Tom Mrakas

Local teacher rallies students, hits runway for cancer care, community support

From page 1

rest of the kids, having my book as an outlet to explain to other kids what happened [helped], especially since it's such an intense word – I call it the 'Big, Scary C Word.' Being able to bring light to the Big, Scary C Word was really awesome throughout school. I feel like it helps show kids that you can go through something really bad, but there can be good outcomes to it.

“Now that I'm older and a teacher, I also go into schools to talk about my leg, showing them that while something bad can happen, it doesn't mean that you treat someone differently because they may look different or have something special about them. It also teaches you to use kind words to yourself and others, which is a big thing that I teach my kids, especially when it comes to my leg, because I know what it's like when people can say mean things about something that you can't really change about yourself.”

Her work to spread this positivity is not focused exclusively on kids. Earlier this month, Allen joined a team organized by the Aurora Chamber of Commerce

for Victim Services of York Region's Lip Sync Battle, hosted at Aurora Town Square. Calling themselves the Next Gen Collective, they went all in to support the cause, raising more than \$3,000 in the process.

She didn't have time to rest on her laurels. As the Terry Fox Run approached, she led her students in their own in-school event, which was an opportunity for her kids to learn more about her own cancer journey.

Communities across Canada laced up for their local Terry Fox Runs on Sunday morning and, later that day, Allen was lacing up shoes altogether different as she took on the role as an ambassador for the Enchanted Hope Foundation's gala.

“I thought it was really cool when they asked me to walk down the runway with kids who are going through something like that. I think it is really cool because if I look back to Little Riley, I think being able to have an outlet like that would be really awesome,” Allen told The Auroran just prior to the event. “I just hope that being able to see me grown up doing what I'm doing

after having gone through something so intense brings them hope and I'm a source of hope for other kids. It's just insane to me that I even get to do something like this, especially since I used to be one of those kids. It's like a big full-circle moment for me. The things they do to help kids identify as not just their sickness and letting them be creative with what they're going to wear and what storybook characters they're going to be, I think it's just super cool – especially when I have my own children's book!

“I always look for opportunities to

share my story and, at the end of the day, that's all I really want to do. I've got this leg with me, I've grown up to learn ways to express myself through it and being able to share my story. I know that it impacts people in a positive way.

“September is a busy month, but I wouldn't have asked for it any other way.”

For more information about Riley's Socks, visit rileyssocksapparel.com. Further information on the Enchanted Hope Foundation can be found at enchantedhopefoundation.org

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Council candidates evaluate

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Strong Mayor Powers, which were handed to communities like Aurora by the Provincial Government to advance Provincial priorities, have been a contentious issue in the 2022 – 2026 Council term.

While the incumbent Mayor has exercised Strong Mayor Powers on certain issues, their use has proved controversial with support and opposition being equally emphatic.

This week, Council candidates were asked if they supported the use of Strong Mayor Powers, and to outline why or why not they believe they should

be used.
Here’s how they answered:

WARD 1

LAUREN HANNA – “I do not support Strong Mayor Powers because they concentrate certain decision-making authority in the Mayor’s office. I prefer a system where Council members have an equal vote in all situations. I recognize residents will have different views about individual decisions made using these Powers. My concern is with the governance model itself, rather than any single policy decision. It is important to be clear about what municipal Councillors can and cannot do. Strong Mayor Powers are created through provincial legislation, which means an individual Councillor cannot remove them. Some powers can be delegated by the Mayor, and Council can still override certain Mayoral vetoes. Regardless of who is Mayor, my focus will be on being an independent thinker, working respectfully with every member of Council, seeking common ground, and making decisions in the interests of Ward 1 residents and Aurora as a whole.”

ROCCO MORSILLO – “I do not support the use of Strong Mayor Powers in Aurora as it is undemocratic. I believe every Councillor elected by the residents should have a meaningful and independent voice at Council. If elected, my decisions and votes will be guided by the needs, concerns and priorities of Ward 1 residents. I will stand up for independent thinking, open debate and transparent decisions, while ensuring residents’ voices remain at the centre of Council discussions. I also believe municipal budgets should reflect the priorities of our community. I will work to ensure residents have meaningful opportunities to provide input and that Ward 1’s needs are properly considered. I look forward

to working collaboratively with the Mayor, whether incumbent or newly elected, and my fellow Councillors. Healthy debate, respectful discussion and collaboration are essential to making informed decisions that benefit Aurora as a whole.”

WARD 2

ANGELA DAUST – “I do not support Strong Mayor Powers. Since Aurora was established, democratic governance has been the norm. The Mayor and Councillors worked together to find common ground on contentious issues. The majority vote in Council determined how an issue was settled. Councillors were elected by their constituents to represent their wishes or concerns within their particular ward. If a concern was expressed by a resident, that Ward Councillor would bring the issue to Council to be discussed and possibly voted on. With Strong Mayor Powers, democratic voting on such issues can be taken away by a single veto from the Mayor. Ultimately, one person is taking away the voice of those residents and the Councillor that brought forth the issue. That is not democratic governance. Strong Mayors Powers were meant to help with housing development. In a recent report, Aurora received an F grade for our housing targets. Newmarket, whose mayor rejected Strong Mayor Powers, received an A grade. Obviously Strong Mayor Powers do not work to encourage more housing. Strong Mayor Powers also allow the budget to be determined by just one person, the Mayor. This does not allow for collaboration and discussion for the financial governance of Aurora. In my opinion, democratic governance, where Councillors and the Mayor work together, is a much more effective, transparent and collaborative method.”

MARCO DI GIROLAMO – “I’m a firm believer in the democratic process, and I believe Council has an important responsibility to work together and represent the residents of Aurora. That said, I also recognize that we have a growing community and there are times when strong, decisive leadership is necessary. I support the responsible use of Strong Mayor Powers when they are appropriate, when they are being used in the public interest, and when they are within the authority provided by legislation. There are also legislated checks and balances around these Powers, and I believe those safeguards are important. Strong Mayor Powers should never mean bypassing accountability or ignoring the democratic process. As a Ward 2 Councillor, my approach would be collaboration first, transparency always, and using the tools available

to Council when they are genuinely needed to move Aurora forward. I believe strong leadership and a strong democratic process can—and should—coexist.”

PHIONA DURRANT – “Regarding veto power, my position remains unwavering: veto power is only possible when Council is weak. True leadership is only strong if there is a collaborative, healthy Council working together. I have an established a working relationship with two of the current Mayoral candidates I know, and I see no issue working alongside anyone, period. My focus and commitment are serving Ward 2 come hell or high water. All my life, I have successfully navigated obstacles (veto) simply because of who I am (Black woman and as a woman). So, I don’t wait for permission to take action; I have a proven reputation for being proactive and building consensus. When you champion true bottom-up leadership, bringing residents directly to the table whenever a concern arises, it becomes impossible for a unilateral veto power to function effectively. I am not intimidated by that. When we fail to engage the tax payers (who are our employers), remain divided; municipalities roll over, lose their voice, and allow top-down vetoes to rule. That will never happen under my watch. I will never move forward without the people because there should be nothing for you, without you.”

BRYNN LANSDOWN – “I do not support the use of Strong Mayor Powers. While recognizing that these powers are now part of Aurora’s municipal system and can only be changed by the Province, I believe local government works best when Council works collaboratively and elected representatives have an equal role in decision-making. Municipal decisions can and should be made through open discussion, consideration of different perspectives, and accountable votes by Council. Collaboration does not mean Council will always agree. It means elected representatives have the opportunity to bring different perspectives to the table, work through disagreement, and find a path forward together. I believe that process builds stronger decisions and greater public confidence in local government. The decision to use these powers rests with the Mayor. If they are exercised, I would expect that use to be clearly and promptly disclosed through Town resources, explaining how the powers were used, what decision was affected, and why, in plain language residents can understand.”

WARD 3

NIKKI ALBER – “I do not support the use of Strong Mayor Powers because I

Continued on page 23



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support of Strong Mayor Powers

From page 22

believe they are undemocratic. Every Councillor is elected to represent their community, and I believe each elected representative’s vote should carry equal weight. Residents deserve to know that the person they elected has a meaningful voice in decisions affecting their neighbourhood. I understand the desire to move decisions forward efficiently, particularly as Aurora grows. However, efficiency should not come at the expense of accountability, public consultation or fair representation. Democracy does not mean always getting your way. It means listening, making your case and respecting the outcome, even when the majority reaches a different conclusion. As Ward 3 Councillor, I would work collaboratively with the Mayor and my fellow Councillors while standing up for the residents who elected me.”

ALEXANDRA BONHAM – “I support the use of Strong Mayor Powers in certain scenarios. Simply put, Strong Mayor Powers do not give a Mayor the ability to do whatever they want. There are mechanisms in place to ensure their proper use, and there are limits to what they can be used for. I see the SMPs as more of a referendum that the Mayor can impose upon Council if the Mayor feels that the vote was contentious or very close to the opposite result. It gives an opportunity back to the Council to further discuss the issue and if a stronger consensus cannot be reached, perhaps the motion should not have gone through in the first place. I can respect the value of an accountable voice who wants to invite further conversation and resident engagement. Furthermore, we have to remember that this is an ability granted by provincial mandate.”

ROBERT JAMES FRASER – “I do not support the use of Strong Mayor Powers. Fundamentally, I believe it to be an affront to democracy and against the Canadian Charter of Rights. Majority should rule on Town Council – one person, one vote.”

HAROLD MacDONALD – “I would not support the use of Strong Mayor Powers. I believe Council should – and is expected to by its constituents in every Ward – work together as a democracy. Especially when there are differences of opinion. In the end, a unified Council must come to decisions together – in open and transparent debate and discussion.”

WARD 4

SHAHEEN MOLEDINA – “Strong Mayor Powers are fundamentally undemocratic and entirely unnecessary when we commit to working together. While the provincial framework grants these powers directly to the Mayor, my job as your Ward 4 Councillor will be to foster a collaborative environment so strong that unilateral vetoes are never needed. I will always vote based on the true voice of Ward 4 residents. I will not be a part of political blocs. Having seen the strain and division these powers caused in Aurora firsthand, I looked to our neighbours in Newmarket and Richmond Hill. Their Councils are cohesive and highly productive precisely because they chose teamwork over top-down control. Aurora deserves that same unity; we should not need to ‘Kiss the Ring’ to get things done.

SMP has caused deep division, leaving no room for grey areas; it has made our local politics strictly black and white. True local government must be community-driven”

MICHAEL THOMPSON – “Strong Mayor Powers now apply in 216 Ontario municipalities and have become an established part of the province’s municipal governance framework. That does not mean every use is appropriate, but I believe the more relevant question is when and how these Powers should be used responsibly. For me, the discussion should be less about broadly labelling Strong Mayor Powers as democratic or undemocratic and more about the individual issue, the circumstances involved and whether the use of that authority can be justified. Council should always strive to work collaboratively and reach decisions through the normal democratic process. Strong Mayor Powers should not diminish the role of Council or replace meaningful debate. They are also not absolute. For example, a mayoral veto can be overridden by a two-thirds vote of Council, providing an important check and balance. There may also be exceptional circumstances where a Council decision is clearly at odds with an overwhelming level of community input on an important issue. Council members are elected to exercise their judgment, but we also have a responsibility to listen carefully to the people we represent. I would look at each use on its own merits. There may be occasions when I agree with the use of Strong Mayor Powers and others when I disagree. For me, the important questions are: What is the issue? What has the community told us? What are the circumstances? And can the decision to use the power be clearly and publicly justified? Ultimately, I believe good municipal government requires both strong leadership and a strong Council. Used thoughtfully, transparently and responsibly, Strong Mayor Powers can complement that system rather than undermine it.”

WARD 5

JESSIE FRASER – “I do not support the use of Strong Mayor Powers (SMP). The ability of a Mayor – one Council member – to veto, override, and force votes fundamentally undermines the democratic process that a voting Council of elected members is designed to foster. Councillors are elected to represent the voices of ward residents; the use of SMP to override those representative votes silences those residents’ voices. However, I refuse to believe that the existence of SMP means that everything Councillors do or try to do is futile; that idea presupposes that a Mayor and Councillors are always going to be at odds, but that shouldn’t be the case. If we’re all acting in the best interests of our community based on available data, understandings of residents’ wants and needs, and our own consciences, then it’s likely we will sometimes agree and sometimes disagree with both the Mayor and other members of Council. Respectful, constructive dissent can often be productive, and debate and discussion can lead to positive change.”

MILTON HART – “Strong Mayor Powers can provide leadership and help move important priorities forward. I

am mindful that municipal government works best when decisions benefit from the experience and perspectives of all members of Council. As a Councillor, I would support the Mayor when these Powers advance the interests of Aurora, while ensuring that residents’ voices, open debate and Council’s role in representing the community remain central to decision-making. Another benefit is clearer accountability. Strong Mayor Powers can provide the Mayor with the authority to move important priorities forward efficiently, while making it clearer to residents who is responsible for delivering on those commitments.”

HARBINDER (BINDA) THANDI – “Yes, I support the use of Strong Mayor Powers, but only when necessary and as a last resort. We’ve seen significant division on the current Council, and at times it has been difficult to find common ground and move important issues forward. Residents elect seven members of Council to work together, and that should always be the first approach. As Councillor, I would bring a collaborative voice to the table, focus on the issues rather than personalities, and find compromise wherever possible. However, when Council reaches a genuine impasse on an important issue, I believe the Mayor, as the only full-time member of Council, should have the ability to use the tools provided by the Province when appropriate. Strong Mayor Powers shouldn’t replace good governance; they should be there for those rare occasions when Council simply cannot find a way forward.”

TERRENCE ZHU – “I support having Strong Mayor Powers available as a governance tool, but I believe they should be used with restraint. Aurora’s Mayor has additional authority over areas including the budget, certain vetoes and directions to staff, and those decisions are required to be made public in writing. For me, the question is not simply whether the power exists, but how and why it is used. There should be transparency, accountability and a clear public interest behind the decision. I would work constructively

with the Mayor, but I would still make my own decisions as a Councillor. If I agree, I’ll support him. If I disagree, I’ll say so respectfully. Strong leadership is important, but so is an independent Council.”

WARD 6

NICHOLAS KASHEF – “Strong Mayor Powers, as they exist right now are fundamentally flawed. While I can see the utility in allowing Mayors to push through building new housing even past a majority of Council, whether or not a matter relates to provincial priorities and therefore a Mayor can use these Powers, is left up to the discretion of the mayor themselves. A Mayor can therefore very easily use these Powers to get their way on any issue they want, so long as they find a way that sounds good enough to justify it.”

ZIVKA KICIC – “I do not believe Strong Mayor Powers are the best model for local democracy. Municipal government works best when decisions are debated openly, different perspectives are heard, and Council works together to represent the residents who elected them. Shared decision-making strengthens accountability because major choices are discussed publicly, considered from different viewpoints, and reviewed by the full Council rather than placing significant decision-making authority in one office. It also ensures that residents from every ward have a voice in decisions that affect their communities. The Mayor has an important leadership role, but that should not come at the expense of Council’s ability to provide meaningful oversight or represent their communities. I believe in balanced leadership, accountability, and a Council that works together, not power concentrated in one office.”

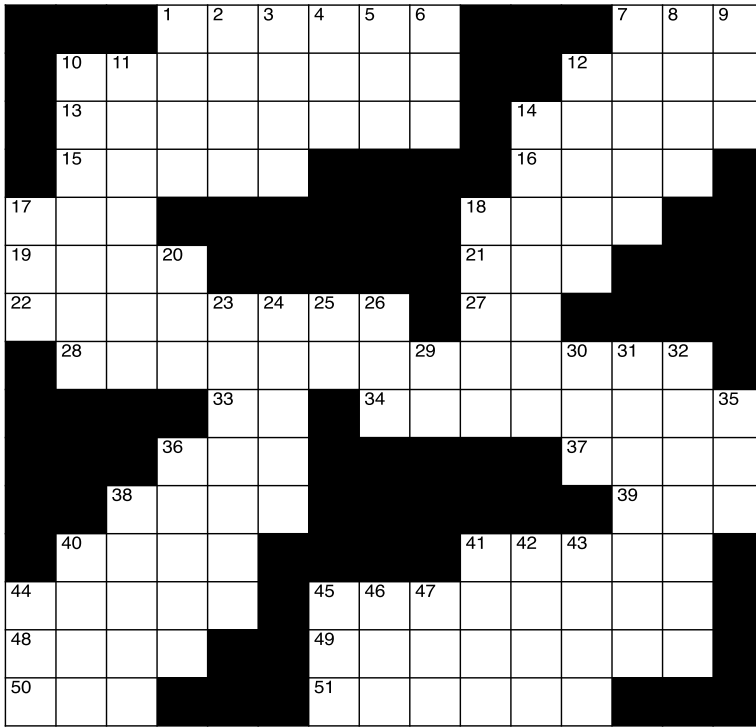
(Responses from the following candidates had not been received by press time: Reza Vaez Ghamsary (Ward 3), Charity Dela Cruz-Toupin (Ward 5), George Tremtsidis (Ward 5), Jibraan Khan (Ward 6), and Harold Kim (Ward 6))

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CLUES ACROSS

1. A place for worship
7. Referee declaration
10. Torsos
12. Used to introduce something
13. Healing method
14. Takes to the sea
15. Make law
16. French coastal city
17. Hawaiian dish
18. Young of domestic cattle
19. Women’s undergarments
21. 60-minute intervals (abbr.)
22. One after another
27. It’s a hot topic these days
28. Folk band frontman

33. They precede C
34. Heavenly
36. Fiddler crabs
37. Major Hindu deity
38. Hebrew given name
39. Cost per mile
40. ___ Romeo, car
41. Rural municipality in Manitoba
44. Narratives
45. “A tragedy had ___ him”
48. Iranian city
49. Praises publicly
50. Founding Father Franklin
51. Herbal tea

CLUES DOWN

1. Indian unit of mass
2. “Tears in Heaven” singer Clapton
3. Part of a sailing vessel
4. Part of (abbr.)
5. Polynesian garland of flowers
6. Keyboard key
7. One who steals
8. Large oven
9. Former CIA
10. Idea
11. Solomon Islands capital
12. Afrikaans
14. Remove thatch
17. Television network
18. Jalen Brunson is one
20. Title of respect
23. Flowering trees
24. Occurring in a tube
25. Exists
26. Woman (French)
29. Expression of doubt
30. NHL legend Bobby
31. Accomplished
32. Makes slightly wet
35. National Assn. of Manufacturers
36. Not sated
38. Poe’s middle name
40. Swiss river
41. Rhythmic pattern in Indian music
42. “Shane” actor Ladd
43. Popular whodunit board game
44. Bar bill
45. Ballplayer’s tool
46. Indicates near
47. Feet per second

THINGS... you ought to know

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.

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Aurora looks to crack down on construction dust in the environment

BY BROCK WEIR
EDITOR
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

A new local bylaw could crack down on the amount of dust construction projects pump into the local environment.

Council this week will consider a series of recommendations to mitigate silica dust resulting from construction and similar types of projects, following a motion made last year by Ward 6 Councillor Harold Kim.

The recommendations, which were presented to Council at this month’s Committee of the Whole meeting, include a new draft bylaw to increase financial penalties faced by dust polluters, if they do not course correct after an initial warning from the municipal bylaw department.

“Respirable dust generated through residential construction activities, including the cutting of concrete, stone, masonry products, and similar building materials, has become an increasing source of concern for Aurora residents,” said Alexander Wray, Aurora’s Manager of Bylaw Services, in his report to Council. “While construction activity is a necessary component of maintaining and improving residential properties, uncontrolled dust may negatively impact neighbourhood properties and, depending on the material being disturbed, may present

health concerns for workers and nearby residents.”

In response to the initial motion, Wray said staff reviewed existing provisions within the Town’s Clean Communities Bylaw and associated legislation to determine the best approach in addressing the problem.

“Staff concluded that a standalone Dust Bylaw would provide a clearer, more comprehensive, and more enforceable framework than incorporating additional provisions into the existing Clean Communities Bylaw. The proposed bylaw establishes where dust may affect neighbouring properties, while recognizing reasonable construction activities through practical exemptions and enforcement provisions consistent with the Town’s existing regulatory framework.

“The proposed bylaw identifies several acceptable dust mitigation techniques, including wet cutting, wetting construction materials, dustless saw technologies, vacuum attachments, tarping, wind fencing, and other comparable dust suppression methods appropriate to the activities being undertaken. Property owners and contractors remain free to determine which mitigation measures are appropriate and reasonable to prevent dust from escaping onto neighbouring properties.

“To support the effective administration, the proposed bylaw incorporates inspection powers, compliance orders, remedial action provisions, and enforcement mechanisms consistent with other regulatory bylaws administered by the Town.”

The recommendations were received positively by Council at the Committee level, with Councillor Kim stating it’s “not an easy subject matter.”

“Every year, especially during the spring when everyone’s doing their interlocking and other construction projects in their homes, there’s a lot of silicate and dust, various materials out in the air. We all see kids, adults, all exposed to it. It’s really important that we do have some mitigation procedures and enforcement procedures in place, and I believe that’s what this report satisfies,” he said. An outstanding concern, he added, was how to address culprits who don’t take responsibility through enforcement actions, and whether they should have to comply with more than one condition as a minimum threshold.

“We would obviously try to educate first and...if that failed, just because a contractor only wet the material once, they would have to continuously comply with the provisions of the bylaw, so it would be a fines-committing offence,”

Wray replied. “The officer would have to be satisfied that the wetting of the material is consistently happening, and in the absence of that, then they would not be able to sidestep enforcement and they would potentially face a penalty under the Administrative Monetary Penalty System. (AMPS)

“There has not been any consideration given to having multiple thresholds required to be breached in order for a violation to occur. I think as part of the report, we reviewed best practices in other municipalities and found that this is a consistent approach. Officers will always try to lead with education. Oftentimes we can gain compliance by simply having a conversation with somebody and educating them on the provisions of the by-law. So, I would argue that that’s probably the first stage. Then the second stage would be then finding them committing that offense by not using dustless technology or wetting or not wetting material prior to cutting. That would lead to potentially enforcement action.... Under the Administrative Monetary Penalty System or AMPS, the maximum fine that we can set is up to \$1,000, so what we would do is we would review best practices, and we would identify appropriate fine amounts. I anticipate that that will probably be somewhere in the \$300 to \$800 ballpark, depending on the severity of the offenses.”

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Aurora has been my home for many years. As a long-time resident and member of Council, I’ve had the opportunity to listen to residents, understand the challenges facing our community and work on the decisions that shape our future. As I run to be your mayor, these are some of the priorities I believe deserve our attention.



ACCOUNTABLE LOCAL
GOVERNMENT, NO MORE
STRONG MAYOR POWERS

I do not support the use of Strong Mayor powers. While the Mayor should provide leadership, Council members are also elected by residents to represent their communities and participate fully in the decisions that affect our Town.

I believe Aurora’s most important decisions should be made openly and collaboratively.



HOUSING THAT KEEPS
PEOPLE IN OUR COMMUNITY

Housing affordability affects people at every stage of life.

I want seniors who have spent decades building their lives in Aurora to have realistic options to remain here as their housing needs change.

I also want young people and families who grew up in Aurora to have the opportunity to stay, raise their own families here and continue contributing to the community they already call home.

That means looking at a broader range of housing choices, including attainable, rental and non-market housing.



GET AURORA MOVING.
A TRANSPORTATION PLAN FOR A
GROWING COMMUNITY

Traffic congestion affects how much time we spend commuting, getting our children where they need to go and simply moving around our own community.

My recently released Get Aurora Moving plan identifies some of the larger infrastructure projects Aurora needs to keep pushing forward.

A Full 404 Interchange at St. John’s Sideroad

I believe a full interchange at Highway 404 and St. John’s Sideroad should be a priority. It would provide another important connection for Aurora’s east side and employment lands while helping reduce pressure on the Wellington Street interchange.

Aurora cannot build the interchange on its own, but we can make sure our case is strong and that we work collaboratively with York Region and the Province to move the project toward funding and construction.

Preparing for More GO Train Service

Expanded GO train service is good for Aurora, but more trains will also mean more frequent interruptions where our roads cross the rail corridor.

My transportation plan calls for continued work toward grade separations at Wellington Street East and St. John’s Sideroad.



@johngalloaurora

JohnGallo.ca

AUTHORIZED BY JOHN GALLO

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AVERAGE CLASS SIZE

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CDS GRADUATES IN 2026

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ONTARIO SCHOLARS

100%

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