

Aurora doesn't have the option to stand still, says Mayor in State of Town address



Aurora doesn't have the option to stand still, and must build on the community's current momentum. That was the message delivered by Mayor Tom Mrakas to the local business community at Aurora Chamber of Commerce's annual Mayor's Luncheon last week.

Held at the Royal Venetian Mansion on Wednesday, February 18, Mayor Mrakas delivered his annual "State of the Town" address before a packed house where he stressed the achievements of this Council over the last four years, and looked squarely to the future.

"Together, we are building a future on our own terms, a future built on the foundation of choices that we're making today - choices that provide our community and future residents with certainty, stability, and opportunity in a time of change, choices that will undoubtedly strengthen the quality of life that we've always been known for because, in Aurora, we build what we value."

This can be seen, he said, in the development of public spaces that foster a "special sense of connection" within a community, such as Aurora Town Square, the construction of an 8,000 square foot gymnasium at the SARC, the development of softball diamonds on the former Hallmark lands, the opening of three artificial turf fields at St. Anne's School, Sheppard's Bush, and the new Dr. G.W. Williams Secondary School property, and more.

"It's clear that we're building the kind of community that people want to be a part of - a Town that has the calibre of recreational, cultural, and outdoor amenities that most communities dream of," he said, citing the preservation and creation of parkland, an increased emphasis on accessibility, and boosting Aurora's overall tree canopy. "However, Aurora's success means more people want to live here and that success brings with it a responsibility to meet the challenge of ensuring current and future residents are able to raise a family, build a career, and grow old in the community that they love."

But "growth without planning weakens a community," he contended, shifting gears to several recent planning decisions made by the Town, including the development of the Community Planning Permit System recently approved by Council that will make way for significant intensification in the downtown core while maintaining existing heritage facades and features.

"We plan to pre-zone for four-storey buildings in our main corridors and for five on Yonge Street that can accommodate a greater number of units," he said. "That way, more people can live near transit, services, and amenities that make their lives easier. That's

how you reduce congestion, strengthen neighbourhoods, and build complete communities.

“In our downtown, Council recently approved the Community Planning Permit System, streamlining several approvals into a single, predictable process. What this means is new multi-level residential developments can move forward more efficiently along Yonge Street – not faster simply for the sake of it, because it will make the process clearer for how builders can build and what the community can expect, also leading to more transparent decision-making. That is growth with character, growth with intention, growth that reflects Aurora’s values.

“In the coming years, our downtown will transform into a place with thoughtfully-designed mixed-use development, retail and services at street level, and residential spaces above with a wide range of unit sizes. All of this will be enhanced by our Yonge Street Promenade redesign, a Main Street designed to create a vibrant, walkable downtown, supporting new restaurants, new retail, new jobs. Just imagine a bustling Yonge Street, a street where people live, where they can walk to Town Square for a skate on the outdoor loop, then head up to Aw, Shucks for lunch or do a bit of shopping. That’s what a modern, inclusive, vibrant community looks like: more local employment, more economic activity, more community life.”

The Plan will give developers “clear and specific” design guidelines, including upper-storey setbacks from the main roads and heritage facades, construction materials, and more.

“We have protected our small-town character not by resisting change, but by shaping it,” he said, stressing the importance of protecting heritage assets like Hillary House National Historic Site, the Aurora Armoury, Church Street School, and scores of heritage homes throughout the community. “They’re physical connections to our identity and the people who first built this Town, because when a community remembers where it came from, it becomes unstoppable in where it can go.”

And Mayor Mrakas stressed harnessing the current momentum to define the future.

“We are moving forward into the future with intention, with responsibility, while protecting the things that matter most – and we all know that the world is changing rapidly,” he said. “Whether it’s cost-of-living pressures, housing affordability, or what AI means for job security, the worries are real, and what we’re seeing unfolding right now on the world stage can feel unsettling, even frightening at times, but here’s what I want you to leave with today: a deep sense of confidence. Confidence that here in Aurora we’re building what matters most: the things that strengthen connection, expand belonging, and shape decisions that protect quality of life right here at home.

“At a time when the world feels uncertain, the community is choosing clarity, stability, and purpose. Aurora is proving something important: that a municipality can maintain one of the lowest tax rates in the GTHA while investing in infrastructure, expanding parks and trails, revitalizing our downtown, and still remain financially strong.

“We’re at a defining moment. Aurora is growing. Opportunities are in front of us. But so are the choices. Do we keep moving forward, investing wisely, delivering results? Or do we go backwards into delay, indecision, and missed opportunity? Because here’s the truth: what we choose now decides Aurora’s next generation: the downtown that they gather in; the parks they play in; the businesses that employ them; the community that they call home. If we continue to choose action over delay, results over rhetoric, leadership over performative politics, then Aurora’s future will not just be bright, it will be extraordinary.”

The past eight years as Aurora’s Mayor, he said, have been “a privilege of a lifetime” and added, “with your trust, I remain deeply committed to continuing this work as we build our future together in 2026 and beyond.”

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