

VOTE 2014: Aurora is 'better off now than four years ago,' says Dawe launching re-election bid



By Brock Weir

Mayor Geoffrey Dawe is not going to rest on his laurels.

The Mayor officially announced his bid for re-election at Wednesday's annual Mayor's Luncheon hosted by the Aurora Chamber of Commerce at King's Riding Golf Club.

Having officially signed his papers at Town Hall earlier that morning, he announced his intentions after a speech focusing on the achievements of the current term of Council over the last three years.

'These past three years have been quite a whirlwind,' Mayor Dawe told an audience of business leaders, Chamber members, and politicians from both Aurora and Newmarket, including MP Lois Brown. 'To borrow from the American Peace Corps, it is truly one of the toughest jobs I have ever loved and it has been my pleasure and honour to serve our residents.'

'The acid test in politics is often measured by the common axiom of, 'are you better off today than you were two, four, six years ago?' In citing the many successes of our recent Council term under my watch, including recovering from the divisiveness and acrimony [of the previous term], establishing a strategic plan for our Town, and putting stalled initiatives back on track and implemented, creating a culture of excellence and accountability, I believe the answer is a resounding yes.'

Aurora, he said, has been 'better off on all counts,' but life has taught him never to 'rest on his laurels.' There are still 'strong challenges' ahead, he added, noting now was not a time the Town could afford 'a return to the short-term thinking and political expedience' that has characterized some past governance.

'We need to realise managing a modern, urban municipality is a complex task and a task that demands strategic vision that I believe we have provided over the last three years.'

The Mayor's address, however, was not merely the first of a campaign stump speech, but outlined the growth and changing face of the Aurora business community over the last 12 months. A successful organization, he said, is contingent on the expertise of the people who are a part of it. He said he has emphasised the expertise of staff at Town Hall to get things done, be innovative and 'maximise effectiveness' in facing the 'realities and challenges' of a growing urban municipality.

“From 1971 to 2011, our population grew fourfold,” he said. “By 2031, our community will increase by another 30 per cent to reach build-out. Accommodating this dramatic change and transforming from a growth business model to a sustainable business model requires a shift from reactive to proactive.”

Reactive policies elsewhere, such as zero tax increases in municipalities like Mississauga, and indeed Aurora in the latter half of the 1990s, provide a blueprint of what not to do, he said, highlighting the importance of making sure organizations such as the municipality have healthy reserves to keep going.

But that is a partnership with the taxpayers. They need to be assured hard-earned tax dollars are being spent “appropriately” and they are getting good value for their money. A service level review, he said, has provided a “dispassionate” assessment of whether that is indeed the case.

“I have often said that government is not a business, but we certainly need to be more business-like,” he said, citing the Service Level Review, along with a Capital Reserve Fund and a Reserve Plan study to make sure these are solvent, as three planks that will play key roles in Aurora's future prosperity. “I believe that these three accomplishments reflect a strategic and accountable approach to municipal government. They are the hallmarks of good leadership.”

Looking ahead to the 2014 budget, which was hammered out on Monday for final approval early next month, he said he was proud of the budget record in providing for key services like the Central York Fire Services, Aurora Public Library, as well as the continued renovations to the Aurora Family Leisure Complex to create a “youth centre” after 17 years of surveys, studies, meetings, open houses and indecision.

He also touted the creation of the new agreement between the Aurora Cultural Centre and the Town of Aurora, the growth of the Aurora trails system, and the future 34 hectare Stronach Eco Park, a legacy gift from Magna founder Frank Stronach, as hallmarks of the past three years “the last of these described as a “breathtaking, ground-breaking gift of a lifetime.”

“It is the direct result of the type of engagement and policy creation of a positive, collaborative atmosphere in Town Hall,” he said.