

Aurora Votes 2018: Aurora 'deserves better,' says Ballard at Mayoral campaign kickoff



By Brock Weir

It's time for change in Aurora, according to Chris Ballard.

The former MPP and municipal councillor formally kicked off his mayoral campaign Thursday night before a group of supporters at the Aurora branch of the Royal Canadian Legion.

Mr. Ballard, who announced his intention to run for Mayor earlier this summer, making it a four-man race in a field that includes incumbent Geoff Dawe and Councillors John Abel and Tom Mrakas, used the event not only to outline why he thinks he's the best man to bring about the change Aurora needs, but also to address criticisms that have been lobbed his way since he announced his intentions.

'People want to know, obviously, why they should vote for me; after all, I left Town Council to run provincially,' said Mr. Ballard. 'I was MPP for Aurora, I was Minister of Housing, Minister of the Environment, and then I lost in the election, so why should I be supported in a return to Town Council? The answer is simply I never really left. My focus [at] Queen's Park was always to serve the needs of my constituents in Aurora. I stepped away from Town politics because I wanted to fix a number of things at Queen's Park that threatened our community.

'That is why I lobbied my government to ensure more protection for the Oak Ridges Moraine, and we did through the Green Belt. That's why I lobbied hard with my government to bring all-day, two-way electrified, eventually 15-minute GO Train service to the Town of Aurora, and it is coming. That is why I fought to bring democracy to York Region Council with legislation that would give you and I the right to vote directly for the most powerful politician in York Region - the Chair of the Regional Council. It is my Private Members' Bill that got the ball rolling on that one and, you know, you'll have to talk to your current MPPs [about] why they believe you and I don't deserve the right to vote for the most powerful politician in York Region.

'I have always fought for what Aurora needs, whether it is around the Council table or in the corridors at Queen's Park. I will always fight for what Aurora needs.'

What Aurora needs at this stage in the game, however, is a lengthy list.

Change, he said, needs to happen almost across the board, ranging from 'better accountability' to 'better environmental protection, better financial accountability, better neighbourhood protections, especially in stable neighbourhoods, a better sports economy, a better high-tech economy, and better transit.'

'Most of all,' he continued, 'you deserve to be heard. Public consultation should not be conducted on an as-needed basis; it needs to be constant, regular and with purpose. That is my fundamental pledge as the next Mayor of Aurora, that we will engage in this type of communication that puts the public first in gathering our information.'

As a former Aurora councillor, Mr. Ballard knows the inner workings of Town Hall, but that leads to another question Mr. Ballard said he has fielded from residents: 'How can I criticize Council when I was a member of Council for four years?'

'People who are watching know how hard I fought,' he told supporters, making particular note of his support for the Aurora Cultural Centre, fighting to ensure the Aurora Promenade Plan is implemented, for better fiscal management of the Joint Operations Centre, efforts to protect environmental and heritage capital, improved recreational programs, and the importance of Aurora having a

Code of Conduct and an integrity commissioner.

?As a young kid growing up next door in King Township, I was always aware of this area's very rich heritage,? said Mr. Ballard. ?Aurora is really unlike any community I've come across. Our industries, from the Fleury Plough Works, to Magna today, our award-winning musicians, artists and performers, our award-winning sports figures, our future Nobel prize winner Lester B. Pearson, and it was here in Aurora that the Blake speech was given by a future Prime Minister. It outlined the future relationship between Canada and our Provinces; pretty heady stuff for a small town at the rail head. The point of all of this, other than a wonderful recitation of why Aurora has wonderful, rich cultural heritage?is that where we live shapes who we are.

?A concern I hear time and again is we're fast losing what has made Aurora unique, that we're becoming just another bedroom community, a place to buy your first house before you move on. We have missed far too many opportunities in the past eight years to protect the Aurora brand, a brand that makes us unique, a brand that ensures the investments we have made in this Town, like our houses and businesses, are more valuable, whether it be the loss of heritage buildings, of good paying job opportunities, of a proper housing mix, of a downtown core that seems to have more empty buildings than ever before, I have too many examples. Dare I say though that Aurora has lost its aura when MoneySense magazine ranks our neighbours higher than us and we continue to fall? The biggest opportunity we have missed as a Town is the opportunity to talk to you, to better understand your hopes, your dreams, your concerns for Aurora. We learn from you.

?Aurora residents deserve a mayor who is committed to protect and grow the investment they have made in their home and businesses in this community. They want a mayor who will protect and enhance their quality of life, security and prosperity of our community. As mayor, I will work closely with Council to set this community back on the right course, financially, with balanced and appropriate development, with a jobs strategy and a housing strategy, and so much more. Most importantly, I will respect you, our citizens, by communicating and listening to you constantly, regularly and with purpose. Your input will help Councillors and Town Staff make the right choices for this Town.?