

Aurora Votes 2018: Dave Heard wants to improve Aurora's quality of life?



By Brock Weir

As a life-long resident of the community, Dave Heard knows the community intimately.

He has seen it change and evolve over the years, and, as a heritage advocate, has kept his finger on the pulse of what has happened in the past to inform his vision of what Aurora should be in the future.

A candidate in the 2014 Municipal Election, Mr. Heard has once again thrown his hat into the political ring, vying for one of six spots on the 2018-2022 Council term.

This time around, he says he is running a focused campaign with 28 key platform planks, but, at the end of the day, they all boil down to one simple theme: improving Aurora's quality of life.

'I think we need a boost on quality of life here in Aurora,' says Mr. Heard. 'The main thing is Aurora is a great place of exceptional assets, like location. From many residents I have spoken to, they are watching communities near us like Richmond Hill and Newmarket be extremely vibrant with lots going on. When I say, 'quality of life,' our community is changing. We have a lot of things [to tackle] like mental health and homelessness and there are some struggles. I really do believe there are ways we can make things less stressful for our citizens, that they can go to wonderful events and they can focus on improvement of services to make things a little bit easier. We all know our lives are busy and very stressful. When that downtime comes, you have a lot going on around you and it is nice to have something in the community to make you feel a little more balanced.'

'Aurora does things exceptionally well like bringing the community together with things like Music in the Park and Ribfest. People gain off that energy and I think that is what we can do to take it to another level.'

Taking Aurora to that next level, in Mr. Heard's view, can be achieved in a number of different ways. The first issue on his list is 'Safety.' Service levels in Town, he says, have dropped while taxes have increased. Citing traffic accidents at the Yonge and Wellington intersection as just one example, Mr. Heard says 'Aurora's safety shouldn't come at the expense of special interest projects. We need a course correction to return to a Safety First community.'

This leads into another aspect of his platform, which is to reintroduce a Parking & Traffic Committee at Town Hall to hear residents' concerns, along with a pilot program to reduce speed on Yonge Street through the downtown core.

Walkability, he adds, needs to be strengthened through increased winter service levels for both roads and sidewalks.

Boosting safety would also entail placing more York Regional Police on Aurora's streets.

Mr. Heard's campaign focuses also on transparency and communication. If elected, he would push to record and stream all Advisory Committee meetings going on at Town Hall online so residents can participate and stay informed. He'd also call for communications tools introduced by the outgoing Council like PlaceSpeak and PingStreet to be reviewed in place of a 3-1-1 call-in system similar to the program in Toronto.

His campaign also focuses on environmental stability, strengthening leisure services, while spurring economic development and tourism with a number of key initiatives.

As a heritage advocate, Mr. Heard has been instrumental in the ongoing restoration of the Aurora Pet Cemetery and the push to have

it nationally recognized as a historic site. He's also used his love of music to spearhead events like The Great Canadian Song Book, which marked the Canada 150 Celebrations, that he says he believes can form a great foundation of 'draws' to this community. Downtown Aurora, he says, holds a number of untapped resources in this regard.

The current site of Bacon Basketware, formerly the Fleury Foundry, is one of Aurora's oldest sites and has the potential to form a destination in our community not unlike Toronto's Distillery District, melding the arts with opportunities for affordable housing. 'If we take an idea like looking at the facing of Aw, Shucks, which looks very old school and almost Victorian in some ways, we can take that and redo the back of the parking lot [facing Temperance Street],' he says. 'We looked at that lot from an aerial perspective and realised with a little bit of a redesign there are about 60 parking spots that can be added back there. What if we came up with the idea that if we made Temperance Street a one-way street running south, on the left side you would see the back of stores all done up, but then, to the right side?if we preserved part of the Fleury works and then developed a retail complex along the bottom with some affordable housing above?it would be very much like the Distillery.'

Over the course of this campaign, Mr. Heard has been looking for quick wins that would bring Aurora long-term gains. One of these quick wins, he says, would be the creation of a year-round skate pad that would be fully sponsored by local business to become a cost-effective destination.

Similarly, a second dog park in south Aurora across from the Aurora Chamber of Commerce office at Yonge and Industrial Parkway South, would be another way to not only boost quality of life but foster a sense of community.

While proponents of Library Square say that this future development would go a long way in fostering a sense of community, Mr. Heard has his reservations.

'You can't make large decisions like that when community involvement was six or seven people, and I was there for a lot of [the meetings],' he says. 'That is a prime example that we need to have solid business plans in place and make sure we're financially available to do these things.'

He has 'never been more alarmed in his life', he adds, that plans are moving forward for two baseball diamonds to be built on the Hallmark Lands when the Parks and Recreation reserves are currently in the red.

'The next Council is going to be burdened with working hard to make up for that,' says Mr. Heard. 'That is a tough start for the next Council, and there is no lack of examples of that. My plan is to be more responsible that way and make sure we dot our I's and cross our T's.'