

Aurora Votes 2018: Hammett wants to bring business eye to downtown core



By Brock Weir

As a parent, Derrick Hammett has seen kids grow up in Aurora and then leave the community to live elsewhere, whether it is the quest for more affordable housing or opportunities in other areas.

But Mr. Hammett, a local realtor, would like to bring his business experience to the Council table to ensure there are enough opportunities and amenities to attract more people to Aurora and make the community more attractive for people already here. Mr. Hammett is one of 16 local residents vying for six Council seats in this October's Municipal Election. A man who estimates he has spent approximately 35 years of his life living in Aurora as a child and coming back in 1990 to raise his family, he says running for Council is an idea he has been thinking about for many years.

?Being a single parent for many years, I thought now that my kids are older I can start giving back and I can be part of what shapes the Town for the future, what shapes it for my kids, to hopefully go off, make their life, figure out what they want to do, but maybe come back like I did and raise my own family,? he tells The Auroran. ?I think it has to be that kind of Town and a Town prepared for the future.?

Much of that preparation, he says, comes in land use planning.

In recent weeks, one particular issue he says caught his eye is Aurora grappling with what to do with the Hallmark lands. While Council has ultimately decided to build two senior baseball diamonds on the 13 acre land parcel on Industrial Parkway South and Vandorf Sideroad once designated as employment lands, he says his approach would have been different.

?That is a frustration for me because I think the future is building for businesses to come and bringing talent to the Town,? he says.

?With the new home developments that are coming up, are we doing anything for affordability? Are we doing anything that helps people in the Town other than the extremely wealthy? The first thing that got me going [in considering running] was when York Region was looking at putting in a land transfer tax on top of the Provincial land transfer tax. That was what I was initially going for to provide my input so York Region doesn't do this. I think it has been tabled right now, but it doesn't mean it isn't going to come up again.?

Mr. Hammett started his career in the technology and computing sector, working for IT companies and marketing communications products. He later transitioned into a sales role, which he has maintained for the last 25 years, with a subsequent shift in product focus from commercial to energy management.

This career shift highlighted an interest in getting public sector infrastructure onto what he describes as energy management automation, including a proposal for York Region to tie all their buildings together for pre-set energy controls, including temperature and light maintenance.

?I still think that is a valid concern today,? he says. ?In Aurora, with the Joint Operations Centre, it is one of the first, if not the only LEED building, and I think in our future buildings, we need to build that into the planning as well.?

Using our energy, however, can also be a community draw, he says.

If elected, one of the things Ms. Hammett says he would like to bring forward is a technological festival that draws tourism into the

Town ?not just for a day, not just for a weekend, but maybe a month long? bringing together 3D mapping for a very unique light show.

?It is a great way to highlight especially old buildings in a Town and you create a show out of it and you invite companies to come in and present,? he says. ?I have seen others and you see the crowds that come out to these more than you would see at a fireworks display because it is visual. If you did something like that in the Downtown Core?it helps drive business.?

The Downtown Core is set to become a focal point in this Municipal Election, as it has been in myriad municipal elections before it. This time around, however, there is some significant development on the table, including the redevelopment of Library Square and the ongoing renovations at the historic Aurora Armoury to make way for a new campus of the Canadian Food and Wine Institute of Niagara College.

While Mr. Hammett declined to weigh in on the Armoury, he says he is in favour of plans currently in the works for Library Square. ?I understand there are some issues surrounding accessibility and a few things and I hope they sort them out. I really believe in that format: creating a Square. I have seen some brief design and I am hoping it is not just a splashpad but a water feature that is more of an adult and young adult feature. Speaking to my children who are in their 20s, they want a place to go for a coffee; there might be somebody playing music, there might be art, somewhere they go as a destination that is not just children. I think that is important and it sounds like what they are doing is great.

?I personally found myself when I was walking my dog, we were going to places in Newmarket and Oak Ridges, down by Lake Wilcox, and I thought, why am I leaving the Town and going to these other places? They just seemed to be nice destination places. When I looked into Library Square, I thought, this could be a beginning and a development for that area that fits in nicely.?

Some development, however, doesn't fit and, as such, Mr. Hammett says he remains concerned about Aurora's Stable Neighbourhoods.

?I really believe in certainly the stable neighbourhoods, not that I believe we shouldn't have development, it really needs to be a little more controlled. I think we need to have a little more input as to what people are building, to fit into surroundings and keep the Town charm for some of those areas.?