

Aurora Votes 2018: Hoyes promises accessibility and accountability at Council table



By Brock Weir

He might not have made the cut when he ran for Council for the first time in 2014, but James Hoyes hasn't been biding his time waiting for the next opportunity.

Since finishing in the middle of the pack the last time around, Mr. Hoyes has spent the intervening four years heavily involved in the community both as a volunteer and as a member of the Town's Accessibility and Heritage Advisory Committees. He is back in the race even more determined to be a changemaker.

?'Being on [both Committees] has opened up my eyes to a lot more of what is going on in the Town,?' says Mr. Hoyes.

Top of mind, he says, is the ongoing discussion on the future of Aurora's Stable Neighbourhoods.

He has lived in just such a neighbourhood here for over 20 years and, since that time, he says he has seen significant evolution in the community. In that time, he says he has also seen opportunities for Council to do something about it come and go and, despite recent measures taken by local lawmakers, to put site plan controls in place, construction continues.

The evolution of the Aurora Armoury is another ongoing issue that has Mr. Hoyes' attention.

It is a tough issue, he says, because while it is a Town facility it is unclear at this point what the public access will be to the building once it becomes home to a campus of Niagara College's Canadian Food & Wine Institute. It is often repeated that Aurora needs more programming space and this is a missed opportunity.

In the context of his work on the Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) Mr. Hoyes has ongoing concerns with the design process pertaining to nearby Library Square, particularly when it comes to accessibility issues.

As a former member of the AAC, Mr. Hoyes says that, if elected, he would like to bring a new perspective onto the table in addressing current and future recreational shortfalls in the Town of Aurora. A new large recreation facility, including an Olympic-sized swimming pool, is part of the Town's 10 Year Capital Plan to address future needs based on population forecasts. Any builds, however, should be done in collaboration with neighbouring municipalities, much in the way of the Abilities Centre in Whitby.

?'[Collaboration on a recreation facility that is completely accessible] is a phenomenal opportunity for this area, especially when people are talking about sports tourism and getting people in to the community,?' he says. ?'If you can draw four or five communities outside to partner with us, including the Region and the Province, it would be a jewel in this Town to showcase that this is what we can offer. Once again, it is not just a centre for Aurora, it brings people into Town, it brings dollar investment and all sorts of incredible things ? from sports and recreation, to standing out with being on top of abilities and showing that we're a progressive Town that wants to be as inclusive as possible.?'

Another reason for collaboration, he says, comes down to simple dollars and cents.

Pending government grants, the completion of the Armoury renovation and redevelopment of Library Square will take up the lion's share of Aurora's Hydro Funds. In Mr. Hoyes' view, this is short sighted and the interest on the Hydro Funds might be better used as

an ongoing funding source. Given the Town's recent decision to build two senior baseball diamonds on the Hallmark Lands, the Town's Recreation reserves are already in a deficit, and this is a prime example he cites on where the interest revenues could be used.

'For me, the two pillars I stand on are that I am accessible and accountable,' he says. 'Why I say that is I am at most Town events, I am around Town quite regularly and I am open to talking to anyone about anything. For accountability, I have always been a proponent of being able to go to the community and do roundtables and sit in a community and ask, 'What is going on?', especially in situations like the ratepayers' associations for stable neighbourhoods. People like that would like their voice to be heard and, for me, it is important to go out to these groups, or any groups, and say, 'Talk to me. What are your concerns? What would you like the Town to do for you?'

'Information is not bad. The more information you have, the better decisions you can make.'

Mr. Hoyes references his service on both committees as large components of this.

His interest in accessibility started about ten years ago when he underwent the first of two surgeries on his back.

'I went from a fully-functioning, sports-playing person to not being able to do those things and realising that my life is changing in the next 20 years significantly in that I would be one of those people who struggle with getting places,' he explains. 'Little things trip you up quicker.'

The playing field has also changed dramatically since the last election.

In 2014, Mr. Hoyes was one of 28 candidates contending for eight seats around the Council table. This time, there are sixteen candidates jostling for six Council seats after the outgoing Council voted to reduce its membership by two last year.

At the time, lawmakers said it was likely the first step on the road to adopting a ward system of government. This might be true, but it is an issue over which Mr. Hoyes remains conflicted.

'A ward system is a better idea in principle, but it limits residents' ability to talk to their ward Councillor if their ward Councillor is not available,' he says. 'It makes it very difficult for you to go to someone and get a response because technically they really don't have to. I am more of a fan of a hybrid system. I would like to see something more along the lines of four or six Councillors, ward-style and two at large. Four wards and two at large would be significant and that allows the residents a place to plug in to more than one area. That, to me, is big because this Town is very split in regards to geography and population.'

At the end of the day, continued involvement remains Mr. Hoyes' driving philosophy. In fact, it is an essential component, he says, in being connected to your community.

'It is so important for me to understand what is happening in the opposite end of Town that I live in. You don't get that by just reading the paper, you don't get that by bumping into a friend that lives in the neighbourhood. It is attending events in the neighbourhood, volunteering in many different areas, where you get that input from communities. To me, that is paramount. I am very content with where I stand and what I feel. My commitment is to the residents. That is who I intend to serve and that is who I intend to listen to.'