

Aurora Votes 2018: Lajeunesse wants to bring 'Smart' principles to Council table



By Brock Weir

As he worked towards his first Ironman triathlon this month, Daniel Lajeunesse set a challenge for himself: using only municipal facilities to train.

It was an "eye-opening experience," he says, in that a lot of planning had to go into being able to use available resources at just the right time. The raw materials are there, he says, but it is a matter of planning to make sure they work right for local residents.

Mr. Lajeunesse, a 12-year resident of Aurora, works in the field of efficient urban planning, and he hopes to bring this expertise to the table as a member of the 2018-2022 Aurora Council.

He is one of sixteen candidates vying for six Council seats.

"I have always had a little bit of a taste [for municipal politics] based on my family history, growing up in Ottawa with a father who was heavily involved in the beautification of the National Capital," he says. "As time went on, I developed my own career and path, and over the last 10 years, my focus has been on intelligent urbanization."

Since then, he has worked for an initiative that leverages technology and other advances to "make a city run efficiently, cheaper, but provide a mindset to move forward."

"When I was working on the Federal Government's \$300 million Smart Cities initiative, I realised that not only didn't Aurora get shortlisted, they didn't even compete," he says. "I realised that was something I could do and support locally. I realised I could help my community by providing those services as part of being a Councillor."

Mr. Lajeunesse is running on a three-prong platform. Intelligent urbanization is one, along with Health & Fitness, and business.

They might seem like three desperate platform planks, but they are all interwoven, he says.

"Let's look at the obstacles that are coming up," he says. "We have that 15-minute train coming up shortly, relatively speaking, and if we don't do this right, we're going to end up with two towns because those gates go down for a minute or two every 15 minutes.

That could be a horrible problem. One of the main issues I see as a sports fanatic "doing them, not watching them" is how we maintain our roads and sidewalks. We still prioritize roads.

"You walk down a sidewalk, trees are at least four feet down, making it very difficult for anyone to use them and you will see people walking down the street when there is a sidewalk there unmaintained. Yonge Street takes two weeks to repair the sidewalks. Why do we not prioritize our pedestrians? If we want people to shop on Yonge Street, why do we make it so hard for people to talk on Combine that with parking, there are a lot of things we can do there."

If elected on October 22, one of the items Mr. Lajeunesse would like to bring forward is a facilities management program that would see more free time access at municipal facilities such as pools and ice rinks. One hour here and there is insufficient, he says, and the Town needs to look at "why" people are using facilities as they are.

"If we want to increase that community of sports within the Region we have to understand what people are participating in," he says. "If we can understand that, then we can support them. The same is true of other facility-based sports like hockey, basketball, etc. I believe what we need to understand is who is going to be using them. From everything I've read, we do want to understand what

people are going to use, looking at age brackets and so forth, but we seem to be stuck in an evaluation.?

There is not a huge cost in adding 30 minutes of lifeguard duty here and there, he says, and it would be an investment that would pay dividends.

?When I talk to other individuals, they leave and go to other towns because they will have greater hours. Why do we allow that? We have great facilities here, but we're forcing our residents to go elsewhere. That is because we don't understand. We don't need to make huge investments in research and so forth, it is simply an understanding of what is being done, why people want to use the facilities and answer those questions.?

He does, of course, see Aurora residents leave town for a number of other reasons, whether it is up to Newmarket to take in its bustling Main Street, or down into Toronto on their morning commute. Both issues are a concern for Mr. Lajeunesse, and a key component to turning the tide will be creating a climate enticing for people to open up small businesses here at home.

?If we can get one in 10 families to have one individual work from home, that has a tremendous impact on the amount of traffic you see at peak hours, for instance,? he said. ?All we need for that is to ensure companies like Bell and Rogers support us in terms of the connectivity they require. It is the mentality of thinking a few years down the road. We have done great. The Town is beautiful, it's safe, it's a nice place to buy a home, but I am just worried about the longer-term vision in that I want to stay here Friday nights, I want to shop at the Market and I want to participate in my sports programs.

?My main business is based out of Waterloo. One day a week I go to that office and the other four I spend in my home office. The concept of allowing people to work from home just makes sense. That doesn't mean to turn a home into a storefront. Absolutely not, but an individual being able to spend maybe two or three days at home from time to time really helps the greater community. It helps us because it allows for more parking spots for the GO Train, less congestion on the onramps onto the highway, and allows for our small businesses to benefit.

?If you improve traffic, you improve health and wellness. If you improve health and wellness, you improve businesses. If you improve businesses, you improve the tax base. If you improve the tax base, we have more services. If you improve services, they are better maintained.?