

## Aurora Votes 2022: Council needs 'different perspective,' says Ward 6 candidate Greg Smith



Over the past four years, Greg Smith has closely watched Council and hasn't necessarily liked what he's seen. 'Concerned' with the 'direction and vision that was happening around the table,' Smith says Council needed 'a different perspective,' and he believes he's the right person to bring it.

Smith is looking to bring his voice to the table as a candidate for Ward 6, a community he calls 'the new heart and soul of Aurora.'

Should the residents elect him to be their voice on October 24, he says he wants to bring a spirit of 'collaboration' to the lawmaking process.

'I have always been a builder ' business-wise and community-wise, with festivals and all kinds of other things I have done ' and I think Council has been a little bit of managers and too much on the spending side of things,' he says. 'It was pretty important that we look to do things a little bit more creatively in terms of delivering services to residents and I have some ideas to help make that happen.'

Fiscal responsibility is a top priority, he says, and transparency 'has to be a big factor' in discussions about how their tax dollars are spent.

'I believe we will have some financial pressures for the next four years because of some of the spending and increased operating costs that come from things like Town Square' and I think it is going to be very important [to] understand what those costs are, maybe explore governance models that might be able to minimize any kind of cost to the taxpayer but, at the same time, delivering exceptional services and so on.

'First and foremost, they (Town Square, the Armoury) are being built, the deals are done. I think from a Council perspective and from a Town perspective, we need to ensure that with the costs we're going to incur on a regular basis for Town Square, that we at least maximize out the benefits for residents.'

Another Town-wide concern he is hearing at the door are lingering questions around Aurora's adoption of a Ward system.

While Aurora residents previously rejected a ward system through a referendum, the outgoing Council voted to install the system in time for Election 2022.

'I think it should be up to the people to determine how they want to be democratically represented and how that works should not be

left in the hands of politicians,? stating he would like to bring forward the matter to put it back on the ballot in 2026, if not sooner. What I hear is people can vote for six people who? represent what they want Council to be and what they want the Town to look at. That has been reduced down to one choice.?

Another top concern for Smith is development and protecting green space. While he says Ward 6 residents feel they are well-served by existing spaces and amenities, this is not uniform Aurora-wide.

Development also needs to focus on affordable housing so residents have the opportunity to stay in Aurora from cradle to grave ? and options limited to four-bedroom houses or a ?condo up in the sky? are not going to cut it.

?There have to be better options,? he says. ?The biggest downside from that is people who have a discretionary income, who are empty-nesters, whatever, if they don't have downsizing options that are reasonable, they cash out, they take their money and they go somewhere else.?

The same can be said of some small businesses during COVID-19 that either shut down or moved elsewhere.

?To support our small businesses, I think we need to be able to have people live here from beginning to end, on a continuum. I would like to see us work with developers to come up with alternatives and other options, perhaps.?

For Smith, at the end of the day, finding alternatives and other options is what it's all about. He says he wants to see more ?free thinking? at the Council table and less ?bloc-like voting and more of a discussion encouraging new ideas to be brought forward.?

?I think collaboration is a really important thing and what I mean by that is we need to roll up our sleeves and be ahead of the game instead of waiting until a developer brings a planning application in,? he says. ?There's probably a lot of groundwork that could be done well before that. Talking with builders, property owners, or whatever, to understand what their vision is, based on our Official Plan, and try to work with them ahead of time so we're not getting into applications and variances being voted down to by Council and then have it go to LPAT.

?I really want people to understand that from watching the role of Council and the Mayor, it is a very time-consuming job. I understand that. A lot of people have full time jobs and are part-time Councillors. The workload is tremendous, I understand that. But I also think that if you're going to sit at the table and take that on, that you've got to do all the work that is required in order to make good decisions. You need to speak, be engaged, we need to roll up our sleeves and be involved and do the work and not just sit around a table pushing a button.?

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter