

## Aurora Votes 2022: Growth and development are top of mind for Ward 4 candidate Thompson



Ahead of contentious issues facing communities in Ward 4, residents need an experienced Councillor to help ensure that what matters the most to them is being addressed in an appropriate way, says candidate Michael Thompson.

Running for his fourth consecutive term, this time as a candidate representing Ward 4, Thompson is in this race proud of what he has helped accomplish since first being elected in 2010, including the development of Town Square, the opening of a new Fire Hall, and keeping an eye on municipal finances. But, he says, there's still much more work to do in both the short-term and the long-term.

There is a great opportunity to influence the next ten to 20 years' time, says Thompson, noting that the incoming Council will be implementing the Aurora's new Official Plan, which will help guide development through 2051. We already started the work this term and that becomes the framework by which the community is developed in the years to come and it needs to reflect the vision of the residents and what we want Aurora to be. By also approving the Official Plan (OP), it puts a freeze on any amendments to the OP for a two-year period. It's essential for us to continue to move forward and get it done and approved so that we can build the Aurora that we all want to see going forward.

That Aurora is defined by Thompson as a complete community we're all proud to call home with a small town feel that is here to stay but keeping that feel will take some effort including in Ward 4.

The Archer Hill development is first and foremost in minds and a number of people have reached out to me in the hopes of having me champion and keep them in the loop and ensuring that whatever development happens, if it were to happen, it's appropriate, it's compatible and is suitable for the neighbourhood, he says. Right now, there are a lot of concerns and I agree with them it is not compatible or suitable. At this point, it is still in the public stage and I am hopeful that the developer will continue those conversations with the residents and address each and every one of those concerns.

A top concern is density, he says, along with access onto Bayview from the site that previously held 14 homes and faces a proposal for replace those 14 with 145.

The concern is this may open up a door to it happening elsewhere within Ward 4 or elsewhere in Aurora, says Thompson. I think all of Council needs to be concerned with what this may or may not set in terms of precedents.

Another primary issue in Ward 4 is improving access to broadband and high-speed internet.

The infrastructure is just not there in parts of the ward, he says, and he wants to work with internet providers to help advocate for

improving that infrastructure to improve access to fibreoptics, broadband and high speed comparable to everywhere else in Aurora.

?As we have seen over the last number of years more and more people are working from home,? says Thompson. ?I think the hybrid model is here to stay and people will continue to work from home to some degree and the internet is an essential service now, just like utilities. They need to have better access to what's available.?

Looking beyond Ward 4, a priority for Thompson is being at the Council table to help conclude ongoing projects to revitalize Aurora's historic downtown core, including the Town Square redevelopment.

?We still need to finish that and ensure that becomes that hub of activity that we envisioned when we made that investment, that it then becomes a focal point for all of Aurora to enjoy and participate in the various activities and thoughts around what is going to happen within that facility and that general area as well,? he says. ?I think there will be some further conversations around what else can we do to create some linkage within the downtown core, linkage to Town Park, linkage to other businesses, other areas, so that will be part of that conversation. Certainly, I know some of those things with the BIA and Chamber, Cultural Centre, Library, they all have ideas and it will be good to bring everyone to the forefront.

?I think we need to continue to foster a culture of continuous improvement in Town in all that we do. That continues to drive efficiencies and ensuring we can provide the broadest range of services to residents at the lowest cost. I want to make sure that we continue to always look at ways to do things better or more effectively. As has been mentioned many times, we have the lowest four-year tax rate in 20 years. We look at other avenues to identify revenue sources. We move forward with the one investment program, which is a pooling of municipalities investment funds to generate additional dollars and that helps alleviate some of the tax pressures that are out there.

?I'm proud of the fiscal management of our tax dollars and the part that I have played in it. Now it is a collective, there are other pieces to it. I am proud of my piece to it. I think the steps we have taken on the environment, collectively, have been great. You look at not just declaring a climate emergency, but the green standards we've brought forward and various initiatives through the environmental committee and staff work to ensure that that is first and foremost in some of the decisions that we're making. I know a lot of people want to ensure that stays a key focus.?

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter