

## Aurora Votes 2022: Mrakas says he will stay the course if he secures second term as Mayor



If he's re-elected by Aurora residents as Mayor on October 24, incumbent Tom Mrakas vows to "continue on the path of fiscal accountability to maximize tax dollars."

This was top of mind when asked last week what his priorities for the first 100 days back in office might entail, continuing on a theme of staying the course following the 2018-2022 Council term.

"We went through a pandemic and we had almost two-and-a-half years where we were dealing specifically with making sure our residents continue to stay safe, continuing to ensure that our businesses were able to get through this so that we can get to the other side and have them thrive, not just survive," he says. "There's still a lot of things that we need to do, and from revitalizing our downtown core—we have taken a giant step with the construction of our Town Square, but there's so much more to do and we're going to continue to do that over the next four years."

"As I have stated many times, we have had the lowest four-year term tax rate in over 40 years and we're going to continue this on the same path. The Town of Aurora is the eighth-lowest taxes of the GTHA (Greater Toronto & Hamilton Area). These are things we're going to continue to do and I expect us to do as a Council—as we start a new term."

Another top priority, he says, is to look at "incentivizing" the building of attainable housing. A significant piece of this puzzle, he says, will come with the incoming Council approving the Town's revised Official Plan (OP), a document that has been drafted in the outgoing term.

"[The OP] has areas within our Town that we have looked at implementing duplexes, triplexes and midrise developments [and] that is going to be a very key component in providing areas that can be developed into attainable and affordable housing," says Mrakas. "We have also approved and are working with Housing York where 300 units will be built over at Leslie and Wellington. That is happening and those are going to be below market rate. They will truly be affordable and they are rentals. We also have applications

coming for purpose-built rentals. We're moving towards having more of those rentals coming into the community to provide rental opportunities?whether it is for the younger generation or whether it's the seniors.?

Looking back over the last four years, Mrakas cites many successes Council has had working with Aurora's Economic Development Corporation, Downtown Aurora Business Improvement Area (BIA), the Chamber of Commerce and more to enhance economic development community-wide.

He says the next Council, if he's elected to lead it, will ?take a real strong approach to ensure that we support our local businesses that are existing here and make sure they not only survive but are thriving not only in the downtown but across our municipality.?

These options include the continued development of the Town Square redevelopment and work on the historic Aurora Armoury, now home to a campus of Niagara College's Canadian Food & Wine Institute.

?I think it was an incredible redevelopment and addition to our community that will benefit for years to come and we will see added spin-offs and growth from that,? says Mrakas of the Armoury. ?Ultimately, the long-awaited gymnasium [at the SARC] has been approved?from a sporting perspective and to provide more services not only for our sports organizations but also for our residents in general who want to get out and stay active. I think those three decisions that the majority of Council made, doing the right things for our community, and they took the bold step to say yes.

?While everyone looks at the ultimate, at the tax rate, I am proud of the work of our Finance Advisory Committee that we spent the whole four years going through each department and looking for efficiencies to make sure that, as I have always said, that we're providing the best possible services at the best possible price because, at the end of the day, we need to be fiscally responsible and I am very proud that this Council has been very fiscally responsible, has invested wisely into our community, and has maintained a stable tax rate that everyone can expect?and we're going to continue down that path.?

Looking back over the outgoing Council term, one that was somewhat interrupted by the global pandemic, Mrakas says he is proud that of the ?majority of Council being able to continue to get a lot of things done? that needed to.

?We didn't just sit back,? he said. ?We continued to push through, we kept going forward with a lot of the positive things we wanted to see get accomplished for our community, that would benefit our community, not just for the present but for the future. That was one of the things I was proud of: getting through the pandemic, that not only Council but the community all came together and I believe we're stronger as a community because of it.?

On how priorities in the community may have shifted as a result of the pandemic, he adds: ?We're very much more community-focused. It's about our community, it's about shopping local, it's about talking to your neighbours and getting to know each other, and truly coming back to that small town feel we should be at. We've always been a small town and while we've been growing, I've always said [in my first election] that we need to maintain that small town feel. That's why I said that everyone from our Council, residents, businesses, are stronger coming out of this pandemic because we are tighter as a community

?I think what people want, and as I have said right from Day 1 when I first ran for office, for Council and Mayor, [is] that you want people that take politics out of the decision-making process and make practical decisions. It's about the betterment of our community and the betterment of our Town. You always look at what's in the best interest. That's what I do and I hope everyone sitting at the table that gets elected, whoever gets elected, is sitting at the table, takes that same approach, and is making practical decisions.?

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter