

Aurora Votes 2022: Ward 2 candidate Rachel Gilliland says there's still more work to do



First elected to Council in 2018, Rachel Gilliland says the community has made some "great strides forward" over the last four years, but there is still more work to do.

Gilliland is seeking a second term as Councillor this fall, this time as a candidate for Ward 2.

Going door-to-door to meet with voters, she says there is a "misconception" that there are not a lot of places to live in Aurora and while that is true in some respects, there are infill opportunities that need to be capitalized on in a way that's respectful of existing neighbourhoods, sustainable, environmentally-sensitive, and within current zoning bylaws.

"That's something I'm trying to push with developers to ensure if they're actually going to redevelop and maybe ask for more attainable housing, which are things we know we need to have within our community, what is that give-back you're going to have with that regard? Green development standards is one of those avenues I want to try and ensure they're being respectful of the environment."

Updating and modernizing the Town's Property Standards Bylaw is another priority for Gilliland, should she be re-elected. Existing standards haven't been updated since 1999, she says, and now is the time to "make sure we're aligning with things that are more modernized like lighting."

"I have an intention to bring a new motion forward if I am elected on addressing the feasibility of licensing rental units for property standards, safety and inspections because [while] we have a policy in place for illegal and legal rental units, by having a registry of sorts this will ensure that we have a more proactive approach in doing these inspections to ensure that property standards are up to snuff and also up to code for safety," she says, expanding on the Property Standards Bylaw.

"This is something I certainly would try to address because it is becoming a concern in the community, especially as people can't afford to buy a home [and] you're seeing a lot more homes with secondary suites, so there has been a lot of issues" with respect to property standards and also in parking and garbage as well. There's a way we can regulate those things, modernize our bylaws, and also make them a little bit more proactive."

Since being first elected in the outgoing term of Council, Gilliland says there are several pieces of legislation of which she's particularly proud. These include spurring the Town's declaration of a Climate Emergency and Climate Action Plan, items which have prompted Council and municipal staff alike the means to look at decisions through a climate lens. The protection of natural

capital assets, and bringing forward stewardship plans, is another area in which there is pride.

The global pandemic, she says, caused a shift in some of the issues that were brought to the forefront, and in this regard the emphasis on mental health resources in the community was top of mind for residents.

“Mental health has been a big thing for the residents of Aurora, especially going through these tough times,” she says. “I wanted to make sure we had resources that were up front and centre, right on our landing page to make it easier and accessible. I know we have done some stuff in the past to have some resources but I wanted to make it easy because people felt just the idea of looking things up, that wall was there and it was very complicated when you're in that stressful situation.”

Yet, there's still more work to do, she says, including projects embarked on by this Council that are yet to be finalized, including revised master plans on Active Transportation, Climate Adaptation, Parks & Recreation, and Active Transportation.

“Connecting east to west I think is extremely important, so from Wellington to Bathurst there really isn't a safe mode of transportation and I understand it is not in their 10-year capital plan but that doesn't mean they won't have re-evaluations on a yearly basis,” she says. “I already had some estimates done by the Region on what that project would cost if we move it up and if there are any partnership or granting opportunities, which there might be, with some of the cycling partnership programs and that is something I would really like to focus on. With respect to Parks and Recreation, one of the great ones I brought forward was with respect to the outdoor fitness parks. Some people in the community really enjoy the fitness park mentality where they can go and do a workout.”

All of these cost money, of course, and “fiscal responsibility” is an area she says is high on her priority list.

“We have a rather large Town Square project, which is a rather large investment, and my role as Councillor is I want to see that succeed since that is the will of Council to move forward,” she says, of the project to which she was a dissenting vote. “I want to make sure we do have a great space to gather, but at the same time, we have to be cognizant of our operating budget and make sure that what we are going to service the community with within that Centre brings in revenue to help pay for that. I want to make sure we're on top of that to make sure it does succeed so there's not a deficit line item on that.”

Gilliland was also a dissenting vote on Aurora adopting a Ward System but now that it is going to be in place with the incoming Council, she says it will result in Council members being “more accountable” to their specific areas.

“When I voted, I think the biggest thing for me is we didn't have that referendum. We had one before and I looked at it in the sense of, I'm supportive of the wards and looking into what it might look like. I feel like at that time some of the push-back was people wanted the opportunity to see what it looked like. All they knew was at large. I think some people really wanted the opportunity to make that choice once again.

“At the end of the day what's been done now doesn't mean it can't be undone if it doesn't work. Let's see how it turns out. I'm up for the challenge and I want to be accountable to Ward 2. At the same time, representing all of Aurora, because we're all two degrees of separation here. We're still a small community, in my mind, so let's continue on with that nice sense of community we all love here and why we moved to Aurora.”

By Brock Weir
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