

Battle over business as mayoral candidates take on first debate



By Brock Weir

It was standing room only as Aurora's two mayoral candidates Geoffrey Dawe and John Gallo went head-to-head in the first mayoral debate of the 2014 election.

Hosted by the Aurora Chamber of Commerce and moderated by Javed Kahn, it was standing room only as many Aurora residents had their first encounters with the two mayoral candidates and the majority of the 28 candidates vying for Council positions.

With a format tailored to address Aurora's business needs, Mr. Gallo was the first to step up to the microphone to address the crowds, after winning a game of Rock, Paper, Scissors against Mr. Dawe.

“Here is what Aurorans are dreaming about: more job opportunities closer to home; college opportunities; trendier restaurants; a more involved downtown core; a five-star hotel; a better downtown core,” he said. “Those Auroran aspirations have been transformed into Imagine Aurora 2030, a citizens' comprehensive 10-point plan to make Aurora one of the best places to live, work, play and shop in Canada.”

Although he said the full plan will be released to the public on October 1, Mr. Gallo re-iterated the first two planks of the plan, which he previously announced this spring at his official campaign launch. These include a citizens' task force to focus on the Yonge and Wellington corridors and to bring a new hotel and conference centre into Town.

“The citizens of Aurora have told me they want a quality hotel and convention centre, and I have listened,” he said. “I will lead the charge to bring a new Aurora Convention Centre to our town. Over the past year, I have been working with two international convention centre developers and they have both come to me and declared their interest. That is very exciting. The citizens of Aurora told me they want a downtown core to be proud of: more foot traffic and outdoor patios, and I have listened. I will develop a downtown revitalization strategy, I will develop a task force within the first 60 days of taking office made up of citizens. This task force will present to Council the Downtown Revitalization Strategy of how to implement the [Aurora] Promenade study within 60 days of its inception.”

In his opening remarks, Mr. Dawe said the “majority of Aurorans”, including himself are “tired of the negativity” and tired of hearing why one shouldn't vote for someone rather than why one should. Therefore, he said he would use the time to say why Aurorans should vote for him this October.

“Aurora is now the best-rated place to live in York Region,” he said. “Four years ago we weren't even on that list. It is clear that under my leadership we are doing the right things here. More and more people wish to work here, live here and play here. The positive influx to Town is because as Aurora's mayor I have brought stability to Town Hall. I have shown leadership at the Council

table, engagement in our community, and financial accountability. Under my leadership, this Council has kept more money in your pockets, we have stabilized the tax rate, provided the best possible services at the best possible price, and we support Aurora businesses. Under my leadership, the Town's interests have been paramount.?

To underscore the point, Mr. Dawe cited the renegotiation of the Town's agreement with the Aurora Cultural Centre, as well as ?protecting the Town's interests? in taking developers to court over the first right of refusal for green space on Mavrinac Boulevard. He also said he has attended ?hundreds of events? from large scale to ribbon cuttings to give a boost to business.

?For folks that put their blood, sweat and tears into their new small business, a ribbon cutting by the Mayor is a major event for them. It is an important message that says the Town is behind you, this Council is behind you, and we want to support you. It is a sign that we want you to succeed and I am proud to cut those ribbons and show our support.?

In their closings, both candidates covered much of the same ground, but Mr. Gallo said Aurorans are simply not happy.

?Aurora's economy is not in good shape,? he said. ?Residents are asking what is going on with my future and the future of my children. I have hope. That is why they have been reaching out to me, because of my inclusive, accountable and transparent approach. They are wanting me to be the voice of the people. They are wanting me to be Aurora's next Mayor. Together we can do better. The time has come for positive solutions together.?