

BROCK'S BANTER: You can always go...

When you're alone and life is making you lonely you can always go...

By Brock Weir

Trust me, I know what you're thinking ? and I agree. There is indeed a lot focusing on Aurora's Downtown Core in this week's edition of The Auroran. My heart goes out to you, I promise, but I also assure you it is not my fault. But, the reality is, we're in election season and many candidates seem to be stuck in the traffic jam that is Yonge and Wellington, unable to venture beyond the congested crossroads to take full stock of what is going on across the entire community.

While I am sure both mayoral candidates will have ample opportunity in the coming weeks to expand on their respective visions for Aurora beyond this very confining wedge of the Town, little else seemed to be on the minds of those convening the first debate last Wednesday.

To be fair, debate organizers and the silent majority in the crowd might have been hoping to learn more about what each candidate planned to do for Aurora's businesses in the broadest sense of the terms, but they might have left the meeting disappointed, perhaps even feeling a bit bloated, after having to absorb more than they ever cared to know about our historic business area.

Nevertheless, while the topic appears to be a hot one, I'll add more fuel to the 'revitalization' fire (and, buckle up, we're all going to be so sick of hearing 'revitalization' over the next few weeks, we're going to need some ourselves by the time October 28 rolls around).

Community leaders representing organizations including Scouts Canada, Housing York, the Town of Aurora, the Province of Ontario, York Region EMS, the Canadian Mental Health Association, Aurora Seniors' Centre, Blue Door Shelters, York Community and Health Services, the York Region Food Network, and a variety of local churches and religious groups came together the morning of the debate to jaw about how the community ? and, yes, 'community' meaning Aurora, and even York Region, as a whole ? could benefit from the vacant corner of Yonge and Tyler.

While the site is physically vacant, the reality is now something much more complex.

From all angles, it appears Aurora United Church (AUC) is intent on rebuilding their spiritual home on their historic land sooner rather than later. Wednesday's breakfast meeting brought these brains together to lay a foundation of sorts. How can a newly rebuilt Aurora United Church best address the needs of the community?

Going into the session, I expected a very narrow discussion on the physical transformation on that historic, now vacant, lot. Perhaps, in a wider sense, what AUC needs to rebuild and what a subsequently rebuilt church could provide to the community it serves from the confines of its own walls.

As I moved between the breakout groups that formed to address a series of questions posed to them by facilitators, I was pleasantly surprised that discussions were anything but narrow. It became clear very quickly that, at least from the perspective of this diverse group, a church like AUC has evolved significantly far away from a self-contained and dedicated (and some might argue antiquated or myopic) vision of spreading the teachings of the Bible to their parishioners, to a dedicated community resource, available to anyone regardless of religion, race, gender, sexuality or income.

It was also abundantly clear this is a vision community leaders hope rises from the ashes.

Although I wonder if some of these respective visions put forward by said leaders might be somewhat grand for the AUC to go it alone, after all there are limited resources and space to go around, the discussion provided invaluable feedback on what the needs and wants of this community are, the challenges being faced by residents of all circumstances every day, and how everyone can and should work together to take a significant step in working towards a solution.

All candidates hoping for a seat in the October 27 election would be well-served by requesting a full transcript of this meeting. It might just provide some perspective and prioritization of what Aurora truly needs.

PARENTHOOD

I wish I could say that evening's All-Candidates Meeting and Mayoral Debate was as insightful, but in talking to people in the Legion Hall, voters did find the session informative and productive.

As the meeting wore on, however, I began to wish political and legal differences didn't make bringing Phyllis Morris and Evelyn Buck together to provide commentary on the debate itself a near-impossibility. You might be asking yourselves. 'Why?' Rare were the times they agreed politically, but they do have one thing in common: they were both working mothers when they served as Aurora's Mayor, Ms. Morris with two children, Ms. Buck with seven (yes, seven!).

So, their thoughts would have been invaluable on two questions in particular that cropped up at last week's debate.

The first was posed by the moderator: "How do you plan to balance Aurora's business with your family commitments?" For Mr. Dawe and Mr. Gallo up on stage, the question was fair enough and both dads answered the question differently but satisfactorily. The second question, this time from the floor, however, was not as reasonable in my view.

"You spoke very highly about your family and how you like to spend a lot of time with them," said the questioner. "Is that one of the reasons why you have missed quite a bit of Council this year by any chance? You missed a very important meeting recently when they [filled the Council vacancy] and I understand you were away because of family matters. Would you care to comment?"

Had I been one of the dads on stage, I don't think my response would have been quite as tactful as Mr. Gallo's, but here's what he had to say:

"There is no question in my mind that my family comes first and so should yours," he responded. "It is not the reason why I have, presumably, missed Council meetings. If there are issues with my family I have no questions admitting that they come first before anything."

In fairness to all concerned, Mr. Gallo's absence from some Town-run events has been noted on these pages through Letters to the Editor, but he has not been noticeably absent from the Council table any more than the eight other members sitting around that table. So, as the question was asked, and the candidate responded, and the audience responded in kind, I questioned whether anyone would have had the gall to ask that question if there were two moms vying for the mayor's seat rather than two dads. If someone did, there would have been gasps galore at what could be construed as a sexist question. In my view, if a parent of young children, or even relatively self-sufficient teens, is seeking public office to have an impact on the community in which they raise them, it should be encouraged and celebrated, rather than being the subject of innuendo.

Personally, I don't recall this question being posed of Ms. Morris, or any of her four challengers in the 2010 election, and a cursory look through our archives yields nothing from the previous election either. Perhaps it might have been more of an issue for when Ms. Buck served as Aurora's mayor, in an era with very different ideas of gender and responsibilities but then, as now, I think she would have cut that question right off at the proverbial knees.