

Community members voice support for anti-hate measures considered by Council

Aurora has always been a warm and welcoming place to long-time community member Nikki Abler, but she has recently seen examples of antisemitism on the rise.

Abler, co-founder of the non-profit group Jewish Families Connected, shared her personal experiences in Council Chambers last week in support of motions brought forward by Mayor Tom Mrakas and Ward 5 Councillor John Gallo following numerous examples of antisemitism and hate across York Region and the Greater Toronto Area in recent weeks.

Unanimously passed by Council, Mayor Mrakas' motion tasks staff with developing a policy framework and bylaw to prohibit demonstrations or activities that intimidate and incite hatred and violence at social infrastructure including places of worship, schools, and hospitals. Councillor Gallo's motion calls for the establishment of a Joint Task Force of all levels of government and policing to coordinate intelligence, prevention and enforcement efforts preventing antisemitic hate and violence.

'To me, Aurora has always been a welcoming and inclusive place to live. But recently, especially since October 7, 2023, there has been a very real and very scary rise in antisemitism, in Canada, in the GTA and right here in Aurora,' said Abler. 'Police data continues to show that there is a majority of reported hate crimes are antisemitic incidences. These are just not things that we expect to see in Canada, but let me make it a bit more real for you by bringing it even closer to home, just 10 minutes away from where we are right now in Newmarket, a children's program at the Newmarket Public Library was the target of intense online harassment and threats. This is a program designed for kids to socialize, make friends, learn language, learn culture.

'Imagine as a parent having to weigh the risk of sending your child to have a play date at the Library and worrying about their safety. Right now, at the dinner table, your neighbours are having to ask things like, is it safe to send my kids to the Library for that program? Should I sign them up for summer camp this summer? Is it safe to wear my Star of David to the grocery store tomorrow? Or should I take down that mezuzah on my front door before my delivery arrives tomorrow? These are something that no Canadians should need to ask.'

Her forebears who experienced the horrors of the Holocaust, she added, came to Canada to build their families, businesses, and contribute to the community, holding the phrase 'Never again' close to their hearts.

'My parents were a lot more fortunate. They grew up in a Canada where they weren't afraid to have a mezuzah on their door. They weren't afraid to wear a Star of David to the grocery store. They said 'never again' because their parents said it to them over and over and they thought it would never happen again. Not only that, they thought the idea that it could happen in Canada, in today's society, was crazy,' she continued. 'Now I stand here today and I say never again, not as a history lesson, but as a warning. Hatred towards Jews is on the rise here in Aurora. I say 'never again' as a reminder to myself and my community that if we do not fight back now, my son is going to have to grow up in a Canada where it's not safe to be Jewish. I don't accept that and neither should any of you. So, I'm here tonight to ask you all for help to make sure that when my son gets older, he says 'never again', just like my parents did as a history lesson that was never a reality for him.'

Motions like the ones considered at last week's Committee of the Whole meeting, which are expected to receive final ratification at Council later this month, weren't just words, but they matter in 'sending a very clear message, not just to Jewish residents, but to all vulnerable communities, that hate has no place in Aurora.'

'You're sending a message that if anyone in this community is under attack, Aurora is going to stand up and protect them,' she concluded. 'That's the Aurora I want to live in.'

Similar sentiments were expressed by resident Jennifer Brooks who said the community was 'past the point of statements' and 'real enforcement and real leadership was needed.'

?It takeschutzpah to stand up and turn words into action,? she said.

Brooks, a mother of four who has lived in the area for 15 years, said she was ?part of the large Jewish community that calls this Region home? ? the third largest Jewish community in Canada.

?I'm here tonight alongside many others from our community to express our sincere gratitude to Councillor John Gallo for bringing forward the motion to establish an anti-Semitism task force. We also want to recognize and thank the Mayor for introducing the motion to protect vulnerable social infrastructure and places of worship. These actions matter because our community has a lot to be worried about,? she said. ?Jewish families are seeing things we've never imagined we would see in our own communities.

?Libraries are being harassed for hosting Hebrew story time. Jewish teens are being targeted and harassed. Community programs are facing intimidation simply because they're Jewish. In York Region, particularly in Jewish neighbourhoods, synagogues and businesses have already been targeted. These are not abstract places. They are well-known buildings and communities where families live, pray and gather.

?Here in Aurora and across the N6 communities, Jewish programming often takes place in shared public spaces like libraries and community centres, and these are places where families, all families, should feel welcome. When antisemitism becomes rationalized, it becomes dangerous for everyone. When it becomes acceptable to harass Jews and teenagers just because they're Jewish, as long as they're called Zionists, or when people try and cancel something as simple as Hebrew story time at a library, that is not activism. It is intimidation. We need to see our elected officials align words with action, so thank you for recognizing that we are past the point of statements.?

These views were bolstered by Richard Roberson, Director of Research and Advocacy from B'nai Brith Canada, an organization which supported both motions on the table.

?15.7% of the incidents recorded in the anti-Semitism in Ontario's K-12 schools report, which was published in 2025, occurred in York Region District School Board schools,? he said. ?As a national issue that manifests locally, antisemitism requires a coordinated government response at all levels. The motion before Council is commendable as for its recognition that there is an urgent need for the development of a combined approach that incorporates Federal, Provincial, Regional, and Municipal resources and for its appreciation of the requirement that law enforcement be furnished with additional funding to confront the antisemitism that is plaguing our society. B'nai Brith of Canada has itself called on the Government of Canada to create a Federal, Provincial, Municipal task force in support of the City of Toronto in December of 2025, when Toronto City Council passed a motion calling for the development of such. Similarly, we have advocated for the allocation of additional funding and resources to law enforcement.

?I would like to take a moment to clarify for you what vulnerable infrastructure legislation does not do: it does not prevent individuals from protesting, congregating or expressing themselves within the buffer zone. It does not prima facie infringe on human or charter rights. It does not create protest-free zones. It only prevents conduct that meets the prescribed definition of nuisance protest or nuisance demonstration from occurring within the defined geographic parameters outlined in a bylaw. It would not prevent an anti-Israel protest or any other protest from occurring anywhere in the city, provided the protest did not devolve into a nuisance demonstration. Any other implied consequence amounts to an inaccurate hysteria. Vulnerable infrastructure legislation would equally protect all vulnerable infrastructure within the municipality.?

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