

Environment and climate change dominates start of Library meeting

Local candidates vying to be Aurora's next MPPs displayed their environmental credentials at a recent all-candidates meeting held virtually by the Aurora Public Library.

Hosted by Reccia Mandelcorn, the Library's Manager of Community Collaboration, all registered candidates were invited to participate, yet only four took part. Participating candidates from Newmarket-Aurora included Denis Heng of the NDP, Carolina Rodriguez of the Green Party and Dr. Sylvain Roy of the Liberal Party. The sole candidate representing the Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill ballot was the Liberal Party's Marjan Kasirlou.

While each candidate had four minutes to introduce themselves to potential voters over Zoom, Ms. Mandelcorn got the discussion rolling with a broad, and multi-pronged question on the environment.

“What is your party's environmental plan, including start date [and] criteria to show that the strategies are working and moving to a second plan, if necessary?” Ms. Mandelcorn asked, noting the APL received several environment-related questions from patrons and were streamlined into one area. “Areas of interest from attendees include concrete policies to deal with development and preserve environmentally-sensitive lands, whether First Nation communities and all stakeholders will be at the table, and the elimination of all carbon sources, including your position on small nuclear power reactors to drive a carbon-minimized growth economy.”

DENIS HENG (NDP, NEWMARKET-AURORA)

“When we're talking about what's the start date to actually deal with the environment, honestly that was yesterday, that was four years ago, that was 20 years ago. I believe that another four years lost towards moving us forward to a green economy, to a greener society, where we have net zero emission to meet our 2050 goals, from the Paris agreement, something we have agreed to on a global stage? these are things we need to be acting on now. I agree with the Ontario NDP party that this is something our community has to face and our community is made up of both individuals as well as small businesses?. We have to be working together and it has to be a solution that prioritizes people over profits. When we're thinking about the environment and how we will move forward, I think one of the things we would definitely say is we would not pave over farmland, we would not pave over the greenbelt. In fact, we would expand the greenbelt with regards to the natural habitats that are so integral to the ecosystems that are within our neighbourhoods and the biodiversity they hold in these ecosystems. For us, without ecological assessments, we're not going to be paving highways over these areas. We will not be building single-dwelling housing to increase the urban sprawl. These are things I think are very hard-stops for us because we need to start really addressing the environment so we can have a future. With regards to the economy and such, we should have a net zero emissions policy and the NDP would definitely be supporting that by surging forward with regards to the idea of electrical vehicles and net electrical vehicles. This impacts the cost of living. Right now, my friends who own electrical vehicles, they're laughing at me saying, “How much did you pay for gas this time?” I feel the Conservative government did us no justice when they came into power four years ago and they cancelled all the incentives. I am glad they have seen the light and decided to invest in electric vehicles and their batteries and such, but if we're not helping to incentivize and make the environmental choice the easy choice, we'll be stuck here. We need to move from the status quo, be forward-looking and build the communities we need 20, 30, 40 years from now in a green, economic way.

CAROLINA RODRIGUEZ (GREEN PARTY, NEWMARKET-AURORA)

“Green, environmental climate-sensitive initiatives need to start immediately. We can't afford to wait any longer than we already have and it would be extremely damaging to do so. As for energy production, we are committed to investing in renewable energies and being solely dependent on renewable energies being net zero by 2045. That is our goal. We will phase out fossil fuels quickly and smoothly and for nuclear energy we will begin to phase those out as we can, recognizing that we need them to support our zero-emission economy as well. We need a carbon budget in order to do this and we will phase out the fossil fuels by 2030. As for buildings, buildings produce 24 per cent of our climate pollution in Ontario. We need to address that through retrofitting existing buildings and making sure that future buildings and buildings in development will be in accordance to environmentally-friendly and

climate-friendly guidance. We will invest \$5 billion over 10 years to fund a green building program, which will create 800,000 jobs throughout Ontario, save energy and address the climate crisis efficiently and immediately. Over the next four years, we would give 60,000 jobs to people the skills and experience needed to work in the green economy through a year of free college tuition plus a year of guaranteed work where they graduate with targeted recruitment for women, Indigenous people and racialized communities. We need to build and use Ontario's mining strengths as well for electric vehicle battery manufacturing. We have such a huge supply of that and we need to use it to our strengths. We will renew the subsidies for electric vehicles which the Conservative government got rid of a few years back. We will make sure transit vehicles are electric and we will be fully electric dependent as soon as possible. This will also increase the safety of our communities and increase the amount of land that is protected to protect us from future climate emergencies. We will expand the greenbelt, the bluebelt, we will cancel Highway 413. We will protect the farmland that feeds us and protects us, and we will protect the prime farm wetland and conserve 30 per cent of nature by 2030. When it comes to climate change, our natural ecosystems are the best low-cost solutions for maintaining clean water supplies and providing food protection. Finally, we will also invest in Indigenous roles in this. We will provide \$1 billion in funding for Indigenous climate leadership including Indigenous-protected and conserved areas to ensure we're being led by the people who are closest tied to the earth.?

DR. SYLVAIN ROY (LIBERAL, NEWMARKET-AURORA)

?We are in a crisis right now?. In the process [of creating Highway 413] paving over this land, the impact will be felt and I believe it is going to speed up what we're seeing in terms of the environmental crisis we have. I want to be mindful as well that we, as a party are committed to increase protected lands from 10 to 30 per cent, so I think that is an ambitious goal. Planting trees, I think our two parties are saying a similar thing? the idea of really investing in the environment, this shouldn't be a political issue ? we should all agree on these targets and achieve them in a coherent way. It is the future of our kids, our future, that is really at stake here. Another thing I agree with [is electric cars]. We need to invest in charging stations and having more vehicles that will reduce the carbon footprint. Public transit is an easy win. If we encourage people to use public transit, we get them off the highways. One thing I do believe that was pretty bold on our proposal is we wanted to make and we can attest that for a year or so, making transit a dollar per ride so if you're using local transit or a GO train, that will encourage people to hop on a train and use public transit more. The hope is really that we're going to get these cars off the highways, thus helping us reduce those emissions.?

MARJAN KASIRLOU (LIBERAL, AURORA-OAK RIDGES-RICHMOND HILL)

?I live in Oak Ridges and the Oak Ridges Moraine is really close to my heart. I do believe and I am so confident the Ontario Liberal Party has put its sleeves up and are eager and ready to make sustainable climate action plan because we really need to have a plan that we're not going to have another Conservative government that will come and slash whatever we had made like we had before. The Ontario Liberal Party kept Ontario? on top of the efforts on climate action?. Now we're seeing we're behind. We're going to be a government with net zero emissions by 2030 and we are going to cut carbon emitting pollutions by more than 50 per cent by 2030. Ontario will be net zero emissions by 2050 as we're supposed to be. We're going to achieve our goals. In terms of energy production, we're going to invest more on clean energy and transition to fully clean electricity supply. We will ban new natural gas plants and phase out our reliance on it ? and we're also going to eliminate the fee for rooftop solar charging panels. We need to invest more on clean energy to be able to have the sustainable climate action and this is what we're going to do. We're also going to support Indigenous and northern clean energy projects. This is how we can build Ontario better. In terms of the greenbelt, we're going to protect [it] and expand on the greenbelt and also we're going to make sure that not only are we planting the trees, we're also creating the jobs for young people to work on green energy. We're also going to bring back the rebate for the electric vehicles and enhance it and every family can afford to have their own electric vehicle for themselves and also be able to have the charger in their own home. We will cut the gas consumption and also it will be so powerful tool to protect our environment.?