

IN GOOD COMPANY: A different way of thinking

By Mayor Geoff Dawe

While it has been a bit cooler in August than July, we have been treated to really great summer weather. I hope you have taken the opportunity to join us for Movies in the Park or our Concerts in the Park series to help enjoy our great summer evenings here in Aurora. If not, I encourage you to check out our schedule of events at www.aurora.ca.

I have just returned from the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) Annual Conference and General Meeting, which took place in Niagara Falls from August 16 to 19. This conference offers a tremendous opportunity to network with various elected representatives and experts in municipal affairs from communities across the province.

One of the highlights of this year's conference was the focus on alternate funding sources. I have often discussed and written about the inherent inequity of our taxation system and its bias at the expense of local municipalities. It has been established that municipalities shoulder the burden for almost 70 per cent of infrastructure costs, relying on approximately eight to nine per cent of the overall tax base to do so. It doesn't take a PhD in Calculus to determine that this is a recipe for disaster! At best, it is an unsustainable model where problems become exacerbated over time.

More and more, municipalities are picking up the workload, with no options to generate the revenues needed to support this increased responsibility. Cities in a more mature state of development are acutely aware of these challenges and their elected officials have been anything but wallflowers in discussing the daunting task of supporting modern infrastructure with only property taxes.

The City of Toronto has ?revenue tools? at its disposal through the City of Toronto Act (2006), however, these tools are little more than service charges ? essentially another form of taxation. As we have seen over the past few years, the public's appetite for these revenue tools has been lukewarm, at best.

The difference in the discussion at AMO has been one of sharing the burden of development more equitably, through the use of private-public partnerships and generating third-stream revenues through advertising or other means. These tools are not new, and there have been varying degrees of success in their implementation, but I believe there is merit in their exploration.

Aurora recently executed a very successful partnership with the York Catholic District School Board regarding the construction of an all-purpose artificial turf field at St. Maximilian Kolbe Catholic High School. The Town had the resources to build and maintain the field, and the school board had the property. The students at St. Max are able to use the field during the school day and Town activities take place in the evening. It is a very harmonious relationship that ensures mutual benefit and a sharing of responsibility. It's a constructive model I intend to revisit in future In Good Company articles as we examine these cost-sharing opportunities more closely.

Speaking of infrastructure, I am pleased to report that I have been selected to sit on the Transportation Committee for Greater Toronto Area and Hamilton (GTAH) Mayors and Chairs group chaired by Durham Region Chairman Roger Anderson.

Transportation is, and continues to be, a critical priority for the GTAH and its surrounding communities, so I am encouraged at the prospect of helping to determine solutions to these pressing needs.

Closer to the home front, there are a number of things on the horizon in Aurora. The organizers of the Aurora Winter Blues Fest are hosting the End of Summer Blues Concert in the Park on September 2 in Town Park. This concert will feature a classic car cruise night and Juno award-winning artist Jack de Keyzer.

On Wednesday, September 9 at 2 p.m. we will be hosting a celebration in Queen's Diamond Jubilee Park to commemorate the day in which Queen Elizabeth II is due to set the a record as longest reigning monarch, overtaking Queen Victoria's 63 years, 216 days set nearly 120 years ago. Details are still being finalized, so please visit www.aurora.ca over the next week for more information.

From Friday, September 11 to Sunday, September 13 in Machell Park, we celebrate the 10th anniversary of Aurora's Ribfest. This eagerly-anticipated event is tremendously popular and will feature iconic Canadian rock bands Chilliwack (Friday) and The Spoons (Saturday). There will be an inflatable midway for kids, the Magna Showdown talent competition, professional rib cook-off and the People's Choice Award for best ribs!

Ribfest is a can't-miss event. I attend each of the three days every year! Please note that age of majority and wristbands are required after 8 p.m. Wristbands can be purchased for \$5 at the Aurora Family Leisure Complex or Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex. I hope to see you there!