

It is amazing what one can accomplish when everyone is on the same page, says Councillor-elect Mrakas



By Brock Weir

In the lead-up to last month's Municipal Election, candidate Tom Mrakas says he was feeling good about his chances ? but once Election Day arrived, however, a bit of anxiety took over.

?You never know what is going to happen, and the anxiety comes from the possibility that after all that hard work you will end up not getting the results that you want,? he explains. ?You feel a little bit anxious, a little bit nervous, and you don't want to let down your supporters.?

This anxiety, however, quickly gave way to relief in the evening when he found himself one of three new faces elected to represent Aurora residents at the Council table. He, along with newcomers Jeff Thom and Harold Kim, will take their places as Councillors next month when the 2014 ? 2018 Term of Council is officially inaugurated.

?I need to get my speech ready and remember to thank everyone,? says Councillor-elect Mrakas with a laugh of what he's most looking forward to next month. ?I want to convey that I am ready to roll up my sleeves and get to work and get things done for the Town and move us in a positive direction. I am most looking forward to being able to make a difference for our Town and bring us forward in a positive manner that will keep us one of the top small-town communities in Canada right now.

?I think keeping us there and making us number one is what I would like to achieve.?

While that might be a lofty goal, there are more immediate goals Mr. Mrakas has in mind in order to move further down that path.

One of his first priorities, he says, is one stemming from the campaign trail ? and that is stemming the tide of election signs which began to dot Aurora streetscapes fairly early on in the election campaign. Mr. Mrakas says he would like to bring forward a notice of motion for a review of Aurora's sign bylaw.

?[There need to be] changes so next time we're not stuck with this mess where there are signs everywhere and out on our municipal roads earlier than they were on our regional roads,? he says. ?I am going to put in a notice of motion right away so we can probably go towards the direction Toronto has [where signs are limited to] the 25 days leading up to the election. Enforcement is a key issue. A lot of people tend to put signs out in places where they really shouldn't be. There is no real enforcement happening and I think that has to change.

?I think everyone is just tired of seeing signs everywhere.?

Also nearing the top of his priority list is an increased emphasis towards sports tourism. Mr. Mrakas says he has been working on developing three-on-three basketball tournaments with organizations based in Newmarket that attract players from Aurora. These are top draws, he says, and bringing these resources to Aurora would have many benefits. Over the next four years, one of the biggest challenges facing Aurora will be to provide adequate resources for all of Aurora's sports organizations, including 50 metre pools and multi-use facilities.

Transit is a priority too, particularly the mayhem which ensues at the Aurora GO Station at rush hour when trains let their passengers out and people begin the mad sprint to their vehicles, or their ultimate destination.

?I am looking to work with the York Regional Police, listen to their concerns, and hear what they have to say on suggestions they feel would help out with this, such as making it safer for pedestrians, which is a concern for me,? he says.

While these are short term goals, longer term goals include reviewing how Aurora landscapes its boulevards with a potential eye toward xeriscaping, which would focus on landscaping and plantings that would drastically reduce the amount of water and maintenance each boulevard commands.

?You constantly see [the Town] laying sod and it often dies by the next year so they have to redo it,? he says. ?It is a waste because you have to constantly water it as well. I would like to [initiatives] like these instituted so we can be more environmentally friendly.?

Looking ahead to the next four years, Mr. Mrakas says he sees the incoming Council as a positive one, and one which can work together to move forward in a productive direction.

?I think a lot of people see me as a genuine, down-to-earth, regular guy with a small business who is able to relate to the everyday family having to pay taxes, struggling to make it day-by-day,? he says. ?I would like to make my mark by bringing a positive attitude [to the Council table] and working together. I know it is a cliché, but it is about working together with everyone just to get things done and move the Town forward in a positive manner instead of a lot of infighting.

?It is amazing to see what can be accomplished when everyone in the room has a positive attitude and that is what I will bring. From what I have seen and heard from other members who will be sitting at the table, I think we're all thinking we can get a lot of things done in the next four years.?