

Liberal Tony Van Bynen pushes for housing affordability and business growth



By Brock Weir

As Mayor of Newmarket, Tony Van Bynen worked on increasing housing affordability both at the municipal table and at the Region and, pending the results of the October 21 Federal election, this is work he wants to continue in Ottawa.

Mr. Van Bynen, who was acclaimed to carry the Liberal banner in Newmarket-Aurora over the summer, says he hopes to have the chance to bring this experience to the House of Commons should voters in Aurora's north riding put their confidence in him.

‘There are a lot of relationships that are influenced from the Federal government to the Municipal government,’ he says. ‘One example is the gas tax and how successful that has been. There are other opportunities where we can build stronger relationships between the Federal Government and the Municipalities.’

Mr. Van Bynen cites ‘collaboration and working together’ as the hallmarks of his public life, working with both the Liberals and Conservatives as a municipal politician to get things done. But, alarmed by some of the policies of Conservative leader Andrew Scheer, he has decided to take a partisan stance in an effort to keep Newmarket-Aurora red.

‘A lot of people are concerned about cutbacks to health care, cutbacks to community support services, and a lot of people are concerned about the environment and that surfaces frequently and often,’ says Mr. Van Bynen on what he's hearing from voters at the door. ‘The struggle around affordability and making ends meet is visible and I think people are concerned about what might be at risk.’

On the issue of affordability, he says it is important to continue to explore all the options. Just before sitting down with The Auroran last week, he said he had a conversation with residents of a Newmarket co-op,

and was struck that despite it being a 'good model' there has been little progress on building on that principle. That, he said, is something he would like to see built upon.

'Exploring those kinds of ideas for affordable housing, I think, would be my job, making sure there are programs that have some application that can help advance that,' he says. 'Another example [of my track record] is rolling up my sleeves with the community. Belinda's Place (the Newmarket shelter for single women) is a case of rallying the community to a cause, and look what we did: we raised a million dollars to advance that project. In the first 18 months, although there are 38 beds in Belinda's Place, they helped up to 220 women that were homeless find a permanent home. It is those kinds of projects I want to be active and engaged in.'

Another area in which he would like to be active and engaged is making high speed broadband for business the norm, an area that has long been a cause for York Region municipalities, including Aurora.

'There are things we can pursue to support the business community so the business community is able to support the social needs [of the community] as well,' he says. 'It's a balance and something I bring to the table: both perspectives.'

The need to support social needs, he says, is something that was driven home to him as a child. An immigrant from the Netherlands, he is one of eleven children. They worked on farms before and after school to help make ends meet and then, when he was in Grade 5, they suffered a loss when their house burned down.

'We had absolutely nothing,' he recalls. 'All of the neighbours said, 'Okay, you kids come over here,' and we dispersed the family for a range of six to eight weeks until we found other accommodation. It is that experience which explains who I am and why I am so committed to building community, why I believe we need to support each other, and why I believe in collaboration and working together.'

The incumbent Liberal government, he says, have rolled out programs that have been effective in building and supporting that sense of community, such as lifting an estimated 900,000 people out of poverty through measures including the Canadian Child Care benefit, over a million jobs created over the last four years, turning around a recession, and low unemployment.

'What this tells me is we need to continue investing in our community and those are principles and philosophies I will be supporting because I know how important they are for our community,' he says. 'I think in that area, around health care, I know that there is a lot of good discussion going on around pharmacare. Ideally, I would like someday to see a standard of health care so that if you're Canadian you can expect a standard of health care no matter where you are. In terms of social network supports, the National Housing Program is something that I would endorse and work towards advancing.'

?I fully intend to keep the party accountable to the values I have signed on with, but at the same times, I fully expect the community will hold me to account. I think I have a good track record with that and I intend on continuing that way.

?Community is an absolute necessity for us to be successful ? and it creates opportunities because people care and the experience itself is life-changing.?