

Local leaders praise first responders as Aurora loses landmark



By Brock Weir

Local leaders from all levels of government praised York Region's first responders in their handling of the fire which tore through Aurora United Church on Friday.

Among those on hand watching the scene unfold were Mayor Geoffrey Dawe, Member of Provincial Parliament Frank Klees, along with Councillors Chris Ballard and John Gallo.



Mayor Dawe, right, watches the blaze with CYFS Chief Ian Laing, left, and Aurora CAO Neil Garbe. Members of the Central York Fire Services (CYFS), the amalgamated fire unit which serves Aurora and Newmarket, were not the only responders who were on the scene. In addition to the York Regional Police and York Region EMS, mutual assistance agreements in place also secured the support of fire crews from Richmond Hill, King Township, Georgina, Markham, Whitchurch-Stouffville, East Gwillimbury, and Vaughan.

"This is a devastating loss for our community and thankfully no one was injured," said Mayor Dawe in a statement. "The Town of Aurora will be working closely with Aurora United Church staff to provide assistance in this time of crisis."

As he watched the blaze from a parking lot adjacent to the church, along with Aurora CAO Neil Garbe and CYFS Chief Ian Laing, he said he found it difficult to find adequate words.

"What is there to say other than devastating," Mayor Dawe told *The Auroran*. "You can't even describe it. I have been at this church for various events and a lot of good friends are members here. It is almost impossible to describe, yet you look at this, you see it happening, but at the same time you can't believe it. This is such a substantial landmark in our Town.

"The response has been terrific."

Speaking to the media later, Mr. Klees also praised first responders in the swiftness they answered the call. He described the blaze as

a ?tragedy for the town?, but said he was grateful there was no loss of life or injury.

?It saddens me,? he said. ?This is a landmark not only for the Town of Aurora, York Region and, frankly, the province. I think of the services I have attended and what was always magnificent to me was the historical context. Whether I was the pews, whether it was the stained glass, the acoustics that you can only find in a historic church, this is a tremendous loss. I empathize with the congregation who, over the years, who have supported this church and, of course, the investment that was made in the recent renovations.

?It is a very, very sad day.?

Added Councillor Ballard: ?This is an absolute disaster for the parishioners, for all Aurorans and the Downtown. The members of this church have done so much for the community over the years and I know the community will pull together to help them overcome this.

?They say that the church is the people and not the building, but this is awful and I feel for them.?