

Mayor talks tariffs, housing and revitalization in annual State of the Town speech



As Canada waits for its next move on looming tariffs from the United States, the Town of Aurora is taking proactive steps to stay ahead of any fallout that comes with the threats, according to Mayor Tom Mrakas at his annual State of the Town speech.

Tariffs, support for local business, downtown revitalization, and addressing the housing crisis were top themes in the 38-minute speech, which Mayor Mrakas delivered before a packed house on Wednesday afternoon at the luncheon, hosted each year at the Royal Venetian Mansion by the Aurora Chamber of Commerce.

"The State of the Town is strong, but that strength is under direct threat," said Mayor Mrakas. "The trade war with the United States is not just a political dispute, it's a looming economic crisis. Many of you, as business owners, are preparing for potential cost increases, supply chain disruptions, and market instability. Residents, your customers, are watching closely, knowing that the outcome of these negotiations could directly impact their jobs and financial security.

"Economists warn that tariffs could plunge Canada into a deep recession, one that could cost hundreds of thousands of jobs and shake the foundations of key industries that sustain our communities.

"All this comes at a time when financial pressures are already high. Affordability remains one of the biggest challenges that we face; people are struggling to keep up with the rising cost of living and homeownership is slipping further out of reach for far too many. Now, I commend both the Federal and Provincial governments for standing firm in these negotiations, and make no mistake, this is a moment that demands strong, decisive leadership at every level both public and private."

The Mayor's speech came just over a week ahead of the February 27 Provincial election and he said it will be "up to all of us to elect leaders who we can trust to guide us through this period of uncertainty."

"As we face immense challenges, the Town of Aurora and I, as your Mayor, remain steadfast in our commitment to building a safe, dynamic, and thriving community; a Town where businesses grow, families prosper, and every resident enjoys an unparalleled quality of life. No matter what changes unfold whether on the global stage or within other levels of government you can be confident that we here at the Town are making strategic, responsible decisions with your tax dollars, advancing key projects, and building a stronger, more resilient community."

The success of local business, he said, "isn't just important it's essential."

"When you hit hard times, we feel it too, and that's why I want all of you to know how committed I am to working closely with

Queen's Park and Ottawa so they deeply understand your concerns and needs during this very strenuous time," he continued. "If the U.S. does go through with blanket tariffs, government support in Canada needs to be swift, strategic, and substantial – not just to protect jobs, but to stabilize industries and safeguard our local economy from major disruption.

"As a Council, we have approved – at Committee, subject to ratification at Council – amendments to the Town's Procurement Bylaw to implement a 'Canada First' policy, that will further prioritize Canadian businesses in our procurement processes, supporting both local and national industries. In the coming weeks, I will also be convening a Mayor's Economic Taskforce, bringing together business and community leaders – including some of you in this room – to hear your concerns directly, identify solutions, and ensure that I can effectively advocate on your behalf. At the same time, I will continue urging our residents to shop local, to shop Canadian, and support businesses, including international ones, that invest in our country, create Canadian jobs, and contribute to our economy."

Looking back over the course of the last 12 months, Mayor Mrakas said it was a "landmark year" for Aurora, which included securing 28 acres of green space, the opening of John Abel Park, the creation of two new artificial turf fields, the completion of Phase 2 of the David Tomlinson Nature Reserve, and the dedication of a new accessible playground at Town Park.

A hallmark of this landmark year was the opening of Aurora Town Square.

The project, originally budgeted at \$51.9 million, came in at \$59.7 million, \$5 million of which was offset by public contributions through the project's capital campaign. Now complete, Town Square has become an asset valued at \$76.7 million, he said.

As he touched upon successes of the last year, he also looked forward on what's needed to keep the momentum rolling.

The year ahead will include major road reconstruction projects, stormwater pond improvements, upgrades to public facilities, the opening of the new 7,500 square foot addition to the SARC, and playground upgrades in several local parks. Upcoming studies include those related to enhancing road safety and pedestrian crossings, as well as a parking survey to "better align our resources with economic development and environmental goals."

"Supporting all of you – and the entire community – also means remaining focused on key priorities, and that includes reinvigorating our downtown. I have said this many times: all great cities and towns are built around a great downtown, and creating a modern, thriving, and inclusive core was a promise I made to voters, and it has been a priority ever since," he said. "You can be certain my commitment to this vision is stronger than ever. Of creating a downtown that's welcoming to everyone – a place filled with diverse amenities, where people gather, meet, and connect. Great restaurants, charming cafes, unique shops, and valuable services. A place that's sometimes quiet and peaceful, and other times alive with energy and activity during a festival or event. A place where you can bike to grab an iced coffee on a hot Saturday afternoon, or enjoy a show, an art exhibit, or a special anniversary dinner. A place where life happens. The addition of Town Square is already helping us achieve this vision. And many of you have told me it has already provided a boost to your businesses. And the best part? There's still so much exciting work ahead.

"This includes the Yonge streetscape redesign, a major project that our Economic Development board will be closely collaborating on. A key goal of the project is seamlessly integrating the downtown business core with Town Square while also modernizing essential infrastructure. We'll be upgrading streetlights, sidewalks, and crosswalks, enhancing accessibility, and adding new landscaping, street furniture, and signage. We're also tackling long-overdue upgrades, including replacing sewer mains that have served us since 1932. These improvements will breathe even more life into our downtown and significantly complement Town Square."

Outside of the downtown core area, there is a focus on expanding housing options, "making it easier for people to enter the market."

By Brock Weir