

Mayoral candidates have ideas on how Aurorans can ? and should ? move in and out of Town

By Brock Weir

Mayoral candidates Geoffrey Dawe and John Gallo have ideas on bringing people into Aurora's Downtown Core to shop, but bringing more people into Aurora has a flipside ? how to keep them flowing.

Transit, transportation and traffic were key themes at last week's inaugural mayoral debate which focused on Aurora businesses. Although bringing more people into the area to keep businesses afloat is one thing, there needs to be changes in how people can move around.

This is one issue Mr. Gallo says he has been hearing in conversations with residents above and beyond recent expansion of GO Train service going through Aurora.

'I am looking at a Made in Aurora solution,' said Mr. Gallo. 'I recently visited Quebec City and what they have there are these mini electric buses that scoot around Old Quebec City and far too often I have heard people say, 'it takes me [longer] to drive to the GO Train than it does for me to walk.' We need to think of innovative ways similar to what Quebec City has done to move people around.'

Transportation is also an issue which Mr. Dawe says he has heard from the Regional Level. At a recent meeting of community leaders to discuss the future of Aurora United Church, one of the main concerns raised was making sure people can have ready access to community programs within, and surrounding, Aurora.

'The Region currently spends roughly \$180 million a year on transportation services,' said Mayor Dawe. 'The Region is stepping up and putting money in [but] I think we need to do some work in how we make that system far more efficient. Bus Rapid Transit coming down Yonge Street will be a substantial improvement in terms of moving people in and out of Aurora, and the Region is also looking at a dial-a-ride program. For many years, I had a bus go down my street many times a day with almost no one on it. We need to rethink how we provide our busing service and the Region is very much engaged in that process.'

Although candidates spent a great deal of time discussing transit, the reality is York Region Transit is not how the majority of residents get around Aurora. Vehicle traffic was also touched upon, particularly as it relates to the Yonge and Wellington corridors. For those submitting questions in advance to the Chamber, as well as business owners and advocates posing questions from the floor, the main intersection in that crossroads is a huge problem that needs to be addressed.

One solution, they argued, is a dedicated right-hand turn lane, particularly southbound on Yonge to Wellington.

'I happened to be talking with a few of my neighbours the other day and one of the comments was it is a hell of a lot easier to drive to Newmarket to shop than it is around Aurora,' said one resident. 'If you don't do something about that right-hand turn lane you might as well take that Promenade Study and throw it in the garbage.'

One thing both candidates agreed on is redevelopment planned for the northwest corner of Yonge and Wellington provides a great opportunity to look at that change.

'Developers have amassed that whole corner and while perhaps not in the very near future, they are very much interested in redeveloping that site,' said Mr. Gallo. 'I believe they would want to contact the Region and make sure that lane is part of the plan for the redevelopment [of that corner].'

According to Mr. Dawe, those discussions are already underway and there are certain incentives that can be provided to the Town to make that turn lane happen, including bonusing (such as allowing developers to build an extra floor outside of the Town's official

plan in exchange for land to build the turn lane).

?Increasing that space and probably working with traffic engineers in order to rejig the lights, I think we could do a lot to ease that traffic jam,? said Mr. Dawe. ?I also think we need to move back. Part of the issue in Aurora is we can't get onto the 404 except at Wellington. I think we need to move [that access] father up and, in fact, I had a discussion with the Minister of Transportation about an interchange at St. John's Sideroad and 404.?

That suggestion, although it has been bandied about for the better part of a decade, garnered decidedly mixed reaction from the audience.