

Mayoral candidates question whether you're getting the best bang for your tax buck

By Brock Weir

Over the next several weeks, Aurora voters will be asked by many candidates whether they feel they are getting their best bang from each tax buck, but both candidates in the Mayoral race have different benchmarks on just what that is.

Facing a question submitted to the Aurora Chamber of Commerce, John Gallo and Geoffrey Dawe were asked how they would strike the right balance among non-profit groups asking for support from the Town for their various events and all other demands being felt at Town Hall.

"This is becoming more difficult for non-profits due to the number of requests being made from various organizations and the Town of Aurora," said debate moderator Javed Kahn, reading the question. "Do you think it is fair that non-profit organizations have to compete for financial support from the Town that is publically supported through taxes?"

Competition was key, said Mr. Gallo, saying he did agree that they should compete because, at the end these are all tax dollars.

"While noble causes deserve help, I think the public purse is not unlimited," he said. "People contribute their taxes and they want them to be spent in a meaningful way, and in a way that helps the community. I think far too many decisions we make we're heading down a trajectory that is unsustainable. I believe there are limited funds and those organizations that do fantastic work in our community need our help, but we need to draw the line. The funds are not unlimited."

In response to the same question, Mr. Dawe said he has tried to alleviate this problem by re-instituting the annual Mayor's Charity Golf Tournament which has raised over \$170,000 for non-profits and community events over the last four years. Bringing the tourney back to life was in recognition of the "many groups in Town that need a hand."

He also cited the organization of a \$750,000 donation from landowners in Aurora's 2C Development to Southlake Regional Health Centre as another way the Town can help ease the situation.

"I believe we assist these groups by reinstituting things like [the tournament] and by working with people to develop that kind of funding for them."

Competition was also brought back into the debate with a further question from the floor, questioning the relationship between the Town of Aurora and local businesses, particularly fitness clubs. The Town of Aurora currently operates the Club Aurora fitness centre and the writer of the question posed whether the "Town should be in the fitness business or should the Town be leasing the operation of the fitness centre rather than operating it themselves."

"I have asked [this question] many, many times and I have asked it at the Council table," responded Mr. Gallo. "What is the cost-benefit analysis for us spending tax dollars to subsidize those facilities? I have a big problem with that [and] it is multi-level. We are currently re-doing the Aurora Family Leisure Complex to the tune of \$6 million and I think it is once again a trajectory that is unsustainable. We cannot keep thinking this way. The purse is only so big. People are fed up with spending money on things we should not keep spending it on."

Mr. Dawe, on the other hand, questioned where one might draw the line between needs and wants.

"We have a responsibility to look at the entire spectrum of people who wish to join a fitness centre," said Mr. Dawe. "We have to look at that from a social responsibility point of view and I think we are doing the exact right thing. If we get out of that business, should we close down our pools? Should we close down our baseball fields? Should we close down our soccer fields? You have to look at it one way or another, you can't be selective in what you're going to do."