

Mayoral candidates sling more than mud at final debate in battle over golf tournament



By Brock Weir

What was expected to be a debate simply about the future of sports and recreation in Aurora turned out to a full blown battle between Aurora's two mayoral candidates as the Mayor's Charity Golf Tournament hit the fan.

The tussle broke out at last Wednesday's All-Candidates' meeting, hosted by Sport Aurora at the Royal Canadian Legion. Sport Aurora's debate was the third in a series of three All-Candidates' meetings intended to allow voters to get up close and personal with the two mayoral candidates and 28 individuals vying for eight seats around the Council table with a focus on what each of them would do to further sports and recreation in town.

Things took a turn, however, when one resident, who asked several questions from the floor, turned his attention to the annual Mayor's Charity Golf Tournament, which was held last month at Silver Lakes Golf Club. The man said in a perusal of incumbent Geoff Dawe's website that he couldn't find where the funds raised in the tourney were going, and questioned the ?accountability? of the event.

While Mr. Dawe countered that there was a full listing of all recipients online, he balked at the suggestion that the tournament was anything less than transparent.

?The people who get it are absolutely identified and to suggest otherwise, that I am not being transparent is, for me, to be kind, incorrect,? said Mr. Dawe. ?The developers are indeed sponsors. Someone asked what we're getting the sponsors to do, and we get developers to do things like support the golf tournament, which generates cash, which goes back to needy groups in Town. If people don't want to do that, I am fine with that. We will just abandon the needy groups. If we think that is the way to go, then let's just jump back four years to where it was. It is absolutely transparent, it is absolutely open, and to suggest otherwise is just wrong.?

Taking his turn to respond, John Gallo said support from developers was not necessarily the most ?interesting? thing about the golf tournament. Waving a typewritten piece of paper, which he claimed was an email sent to him ?anonymously?, he questioned Mr. Dawe on who actually organized the event.

?I will tell you who organized it: the staff at the Town of Aurora organized this ? and who pays for the staff at the Town of Aurora? Guess what.?

?That's bullshit,? replied Mr. Dawe. ?I am not going to sit here and let someone lie.?

After admonishing Mr. Dawe for being ?unprofessional?, Mr. Gallo went on to claim staff members were ?forced? to take vacation days to organize the event.

?I have no issue with what the Mayor was doing, raising money for great purposes. My issue is how he went about doing it. It is not a Town of Aurora-sponsored event. He should have got authority from the Town of Aurora before using Town resources to organize his event. Other people will have to ask him whether or not staff participated in organizing that event and I wonder why. Did they take a vacation day? Probably. Were they forced to? I don't know. I have a letter here, anonymous, mailed to me from someone explaining exactly what happened with the Mayor's Golf Tournament and I may very well take out the names and put it on a blog on my website if you want to see exactly what happened..?

(At press time, Mr. Gallo had not produced any form of the email in question ? redacted or otherwise ? to his blog. When The Auroran asked whether or not he had any intentions on doing so, he said he was still ?considering? it.)

Nevertheless, Mr. Dawe continued to call B.S. in not so many words on Mr. Gallo's claims, as did organizers who put together this year's tourney.

?No, I didn't force anybody to work on the Mayor's Charity Golf Tournament,? Mr. Dawe continued. ?People volunteered. Yes, we did have staff members work on it. They took a vacation day for that day. If we had a meeting, it happens at lunchtime. The committee is co-chaired by Tim Jones, who does not work for the Town, by Steve Hinder who does not work for the Town, Melanie Bell who does not work for the Town, the majority of people do not work for the Town.?

Ms. Bell also took the opportunity to go up to the microphone to counter Mr. Gallo's claims.

?I have been on the Mayor's Golf Tournament for the past three years and I can hold my hand up and say it is community members that are a part of the Committee,? she said. ?We work very hard so we can give back to the community and all of those organizations benefit from having this tournament. So, what if builders take part? There are sponsors that are part of the tournament, so all of those funds that are raised go towards helping local community organizations in the Town of Aurora. It just made me so angry and cross because the transparency is there.?

Days after the event, Mr. Dawe said while he and Ms. Bell were so ?agitated? by the claims that emotion came into the conversation, he was unrepentant about his word choice, adding that three staff members ultimately decided to take vacation days to participate in the tournament.

?Sometimes you don't think so well when you are that emotional about the thing,? he said. I have only had one negative comment [about the word]. All the others said, ?It is about time you showed some passion, dude,' because I tend to be a far more reserved person than not. [Those claims were] politics at its lowest form.?