

Michael Thompson to seek third Council term



By Brock Weir

Big issues are set to become the hallmark of the final months of this Council term, and Michael Thompson would like to see these projects through to completion in the years ahead.

Councillor Thompson formally registered as a Council candidate in this fall's municipal election on Thursday morning.

He is the second person to throw their hat into the race to claim six spots on the 2018-2022 Council after accessibility advocate Matthew Abas, who declared his intentions last month.

"It is a tremendous honour to serve as a Councillor in the Town of Aurora," says Councillor Thompson. "We have moved forward on a number of big issues this term – Library Square, Downtown Revitalization, brought in Niagara College as well – so, I would like to be a part of the continuation of those projects next term.

"There are also some big ones on the horizon: the Official Plan will be done next term and I would like to be part of managing that growth and add some input and involvement in that. Mostly, municipal government touches people's lives on a daily basis and I just want to continue, with the support of the residents to play a small role."

Councillor Thompson was first elected in 2010.

Focusing on the current Council term, he says he counts movement on Aurora's Cultural Precinct (the neighbourhoods encompassing the Aurora Public Library, Aurora Cultural Centre, Town Park, the future Library Square, the historic Armoury and other landmarks) as a particularly proud achievement of this Council, one which will be "tremendously important" for the future of Aurora in the years ahead.

"I think seeing it after so many years finally starting to move forward, albeit with challenges, is the thing I am most excited about continuing on and being a part of," he says. "[The role of a Councillor] is just about two things: it is about taking care of our residents today and making sure we're making good decisions for the residents of tomorrow."

Two terms as an elected official, however, can give one a unique perspective on the evolving role of local lawmakers. While Councillor Thompson says the Mayor might be the "head" of Council, each of the members has "the responsibility to be leaders and take those reins at times and lead in different ways."

"I think that is always an evolving role. There is a bit of mentorship; you're always going to have new councillors come on board, and I think we all bear that responsibility," he says. "In terms of the community, I think the role is always going to evolve a little bit because legislation changes, there are so many this year. We have the changes with regards to the OMB (Ontario Municipal Board) and land planning and that is becoming more and more of a challenging issue as Aurora is past build out and we're looking at more infill. The decisions we make have a more resounding impact going forward."

Those changes to the OMB have come about in no small part due to the efforts of himself and Councillor Tom Mrakas who led a working group of colleagues from a wide array of Ontario municipalities to push for change. The momentum the working group generated bore fruit earlier this year when the OMB itself was scrapped by the Provincial government.

"Sometimes you go up to these larger issues and it is the old saying of, 'Can I make a difference?' Then you throw the pebble in the

pond and the ripple effect has an impact,? says Councillor Thompson. ?There was some satisfaction at the end of the day that we helped make a difference and we helped gather like-minded communities to help move things along. To what degree we made a difference, we will never really know, but we certainly feel that it did help move the needle forward and make that change, and it exceeded what we wanted. When we first started, we didn't think that we would get a lot of traction to abolish the OMB and create something new, so we were really pushing for reform but, at the end of the day, they created something brand new.?

At this point, however, while there is some room to look ahead to this fall's election, Councillor Thompson says his main priority at this point is finishing the work of this term.

?We have big items to deal with now and we'll worry about next term as we get closer to the date, if I am fortunate enough to get re-elected. I hope we all just focus on doing what is right for the Town.?