

Moyle takes the helm as Aurora's interim CAO



By Brock Weir

Patrick Moyle sees himself as something of an hourglass ? not necessarily in terms of a Marilyn Monroe-like figure, but how he sees himself fitting in at the Town of Aurora.

Mr. Moyle took the helm as Aurora's interim Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) earlier this month. In this capacity, one of his primary responsibilities will be to helm the process to find a permanent replacement for Neil Garbe, who left Aurora this summer for the same job in Richmond Hill. But Mr. Moyle will also be tasked with a wholesale review of how things operate at Town Hall.

?I firmly believe in an approach that was developed by Dr. David Siegel where he describes the role of a CAO as the pinch point between an hourglass,? says Mr. Moyle. ?The top part of the glass has the elected officials and their jobs are to make policy and make decisions. The job of the bottom part of the hourglass is staff and their job is to provide advice and implement the decisions and policies of Council. The pinch point is the CAO and his or her job is to make sure Council's will and Council's decisions are implemented through staff.?

It is a formula that has evidently served Mr. Moyle well.

An urban and regional planner early in his career, he served as Planning Director in Huntsville where he was eventually appointed CAO when the municipality changed the structure of their government. From there, he spent time working in the private sector before returning to the municipal sphere as CAO of Orangeville, Caledon, Halton and, in an interim capacity, in the City of Burlington.

?I really believe municipal government is where the action is,? says Mr. Moyle, who also served as Executive Director for the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) for nearly six years. ?It is closest to the people, it is open, it is transparent, and it is accountable much more so than the other two orders of government. It is pretty rare if you decided to walk up University Avenue into Queen's Park to sit in on a caucus or cabinet meeting. In fact, the security would march you out of the building. In the municipal world, you are encouraged to be involved in the budget process.?

It is this sense of being close to the action through municipal government that keeps Mr. Moyle coming back for more, particularly in an interim capacity. From his time at AMO, he came to see Aurora as a well-run organization within a community with very engaged residents. Aurora, he says, does not have the same level of social problems faced by other municipalities, and ?has a reasonably healthy financial situation? compared to many others.

When the opportunity to replace Mr. Garbe presented itself, Mr. Moyle says he saw a chance to provide some value.

?I jumped at it for three reasons: to serve in an interim capacity, to help find the permanent CAO, and to provide advice for the

organizational structure and those are tasks I just completed in the City of Burlington,? says Mr. Moyle.

Over the next several weeks, Mr. Moyle will be working with Council to develop a candidate profile for the ideal CAO, qualities which will then be agreed to by Council. Good candidates need to have a ?good and thorough? understanding of municipal government, have leadership and communication ability in spades, and being a strategic thinker is also important.

?My job will also be to provide some advice to Council and the incoming CAO on what the structure should look like,? he adds. ?The new CAO should have a significant amount of say in what the structure might look like if, in fact, there are some changes to be made. We haven't begun that exercise yet. From what I have been able to assess so far is Aurora is blessed with good quality staff.?

Although a fan of the sitcom The Big Bang Theory, he is not a fan of applying a ?Big Bang? principle when looking at change. In a place where changes aren't necessarily obvious, incremental change is the way forward and it is generally accepted by staff, he says.

?Having said that, if an organization was in free fall and there was significant structural problems with how services were being delivered and how staff were doing their jobs, then you can take much more direct action to correct those through structural improvements,? he says. ?I always ask this one question: What is the problem we're trying to solve?

?It is human nature to immediately find a solution, but the problem itself hasn't been identified yet. You need clear definition of the problem you are trying to solve, consensus from the decision-makers it is a problem, and you go about solving it. Many things go sideways if you don't have a good problem definition at the beginning for overriding obvious reasons.?

Mr. Moyle and his wife are residents of Caledon. They have a daughter who works for Public Health Ontario, a son who is ?a recently minted civil engineer?, and they are the proud grandparents of a new little boy.