

Mrakas supports Regional fire service in first speech of Mayoral bid



By Brock Weir

Local fire services should join together to form a Regional department in a bid to maintain service but reduce costs to taxpayers, says mayoral candidate Tom Mrakas.

Councillor Mrakas, who launched his bid to be Aurora's next mayor last week, outlined planks in his vision for Aurora on Thursday night, before over 200 supporters at Aw, Shucks.

?Without raising your taxes, there is only so much we can accomplish with your tax dollars, so we need to find better ways to do more with the same or less,? he said. ?After all, that is what you're already doing in your homes or businesses. I think that is reasonable to expect the same from your municipal government. Most candidates will promise to lower your taxes, get their hands out of your pocket, but I didn't do that: as your representative on Council, I didn't make promises, I delivered. I searched for savings wherever I could to lower your taxes while keeping the services you need. I looked at operational costs [and] with the support of my fellow Councillors, was able to reduce the tax levy without impacting service delivery.

?Holding the line on taxes is a good start, but Aurora is on the verge of being built out and without development charges to rely on, we need to find viable strategies?managing our tax burden going forward. We need to continue to build our reserves while looking for operational efficiencies, efficiencies like joint service agreements with other municipalities. Costly services such as fire protection, can be better delivered at a better price if we join together with other municipalities. Aurora already has joined with Newmarket to provide that fire service; however, to achieve real cost savings, I believe the fire service should be a regional service similar to the police Service. Bottom line: we need to find better ways to deliver the services our residents need at standards they expect.?

Since he was first elected to Council four years ago, Councillor Mrakas said he has spent his time ?taking the pulse of the community? by making himself available through all avenues, in person, and in going door to door.

In the process, Aurora residents outlined seven key priorities: taxes and services, growth and development, sports and recreation, traffic and transit, livability, economic development, and leadership. The latter, he said, was the most important issue raised.

?You need a mayor who will act, a mayor who will get things done, I've heard you loud and clear,? he said. ?You need strong leadership, leadership that truly works in all senses of the word. I agree having a vision is great, having a plan is necessary, but it doesn't matter if you can't get it done. The Mayor's job is to lead Council and get things done for our community. At the end of the day, the Mayor is just one voice, one vote, so you can't get things done by going it alone.

?Vision to reality takes teamwork. Teamwork is build on relationships. We know relationships are built on trust and mutual respect. An effective mayor builds consensus by building relationships with his colleagues. You get support by giving support, listening to all viewpoints, engaging in meaningful dialogue and not just paying lip service, but truly supporting your colleagues.?

Over the course of his time on Council, Councillor Mrakas, along with Councillor Michael Thompson, led the charge which ultimately led to the Province replacing the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB) with local appeals tribunals which will give municipalities a greater say in their own planning matters.

?Growth isn't a bad word,? he said. ?I don't think any of us in Aurora want the Town to become a place where time has stopped, but I think many of us, myself included, are alarmed at how things have changed in our community. We want appropriate and smarter growth; growth that meets the needs of our present and our future. We want to maintain what's unique about Aurora as we grow. While the OMB is no more, we now have the local planning appeal tribunal. They have given us the power and the responsibility to ensure our community grows the way we want it to, but it will take real leadership to make that happen.

?Promises don't mean anything if you don't have a realistic plan to deliver. Grand visions and strategies are useless if you can't get behind them. Leading alone gets you nowhere. Leading together gets you to where we want to go.?