

New Council begins 'journey towards shared, positive future,' says Mrakas



Aurora's newly-elected Council has begun its 'journey towards [a] shared, positive future.'

That was the message delivered last Tuesday night by Mayor Tom Mrakas as the Council of 2022-2026 was formally sworn in at Town Hall.

The event, which featured the Royal Canadian Legion Colour Guard, bagpipers from St. Andrew's College, and the words of Town Crier John Webster reverberating throughout the room, was an opportunity for Mrakas, who begins in his second term in Aurora's top job, as well as Council members, to set the tone for the next four years.

'Like any first meeting of a new Council, tonight is filled with excitement and possibilities both of what we can achieve over the next four years,' said Mrakas after taking his oath of office. 'Each of us here tonight shares a common goal: a shared belief in a better future for Aurora. I know I speak for all of us when I say we're eager to get to work for you: the residents of our wonderful Town.'

Continuing his message to residents, Mayor Mrakas said he was 'thankful' residents put their faith in him and the six members of Council elected on October 24: Councillors Ron Weese (Ward 1), Rachel Gilliland (Ward 2), Wendy Gaertner (Ward 3), Michael Thompson (Ward 4), John Gallo (Ward 5), and Harold Kim (Ward 6).

The second time around, he added, left him with an 'even deeper sense of honour' than when he was elected to the Mayor's seat for the first time in 2018 and now he also feels 'a profound sense of responsibility to build on the work done to date and to continue to move our Town forward with positive change.'

'Tonight we stand before you as your newly-elected Council, a group of seven independent representatives, free-thinkers, elected with the shared responsibility to do our individual and collective best for the community we serve,' said Mrakas, who was first elected to Council in 2014. 'Our ability to work together towards the revitalization of that shared vision for a better future for Aurora will mark the success of this term of Council and that future begins tonight.'

'The next four years represent an opportunity for this Council to build on the work of those who have gone before us and to forge ahead with the community initiatives, new and in progress, that will position Aurora for continued success today, tomorrow, and [for] generations to come.'

There is a lot to be positive about, he said. In his view, last month's election results, which saw himself and five out of six Council incumbents returned to the table, were "largely an affirmation" that the 2018-2022 Council was "on the right track."

"Businesses are locating in Aurora, new recreational facilities, parks and trails have opened. Our downtown core is coming back to life. Town Square is nearing completion and we have achieved this while maintaining the lowest four-year tax rate in 20 years. Fiscally responsible decisions have ensured Aurora is in a strong and healthy financial position. Aurora has consistently ranked as one of the best places to live, not only in York Region, but in the country. For those who have lived here for generations, to residents just newly arrived, we all live in Aurora for the same reason: because it's simply a fantastic place to live.

"Residents expect us as their elected representatives to keep this positive momentum going and you expect us to address the issues that challenge that positive forward momentum. From increasing traffic congestion to aging infrastructure, from threats to our green spaces and heritage buildings, to managing growth and development, you expect this Council to work collaboratively to find innovative solutions and leverage all the tools available to us to not only meet these challenges but to seize the opportunities that will enable us to continue to build the liveable community we can be proud to leave for our children."

This is something that can be achieved together through a focus on fiscal accountability and support for initiatives that have positive impacts on the community, he added.

In his remarks, Mrakas renewed his advocacy for a municipality's right to determine how and where it grows, as well as his commitment to promote the community.

"As your Mayor, I will continue to fight for your right to have a say in the matters that have a direct impact on your quality of life," he said. "My priorities are your priorities and as your mayor I will spend the next four years continuing to work with you and for you to provide the collaborative leadership and community focus, common-sense solutions that you expect. I will continue to be Aurora's ambassador, always promoting what's best about our Town. I will continue to be our voice at the Region, ensuring the promotion and protection of Aurora's interests, and I will continue to work with all levels of government to develop Made-for-Aurora solutions to the complex, integrated issues of housing, affordability, and growth and development.

"I have made a commitment to you to provide leadership that cares, that's engaged and delivers, to be a working mayor who is out in the community at your doorstep, your kitchen table, your shop floor or your back yard, listening to you directly to hear first-hand about your concerns, your issues and your ideas; most important, to take action. I have always believed that the best decisions for our community are made when we work together. It takes Council as a whole, working together, to affect meaningful change. I will leverage my ability to bring people together to build on their strengths and to find consensus so we can achieve the positive outcomes our community expects. I am looking forward to getting down to work with Council and staff to realize your vision for Aurora: an inclusive, resilient community where everyone is welcome."

By Brock Weir
Editor
Local Journalism Initiative Reporter