

Paul Pirri proud of eight year as at Council table



By Brock Weir

Councillor Paul Pirri is still finding the right words for his farewell message as the 2014 ? 2018 Council term convenes one last time this Tuesday.

Councillor Pirri, who was first elected as Aurora's youngest Council member in the 2010 ? 2014 term, announced earlier this year he would not seek re-election, seeking other opportunities as he takes the 'next steps' in his life, including pursuing a masters' degree. Watching a municipal election from the sidelines for the first time in eight years offered him a different perspective and he says he is struck by the 'positive' visions that ultimately rose to the top.

'I think people who put forward a positive vision for Aurora did pretty well,' he says. 'I think both Geoff (Dawe) and Tom (Mrakas) put forward some positive visions and I think having finished first and second, they were rewarded for the visions they put forward ? and I think that is true of Council as well.'

Eight years ago, Paul Pirri also campaigned on a positive message. Aurora, at the time, was in the headlines for 'all the wrong reasons' and he wanted to be a part of the team that could, from his perspective, right the ship.

'I ran because I thought I could lend a different voice to Council being a younger guy at the time,' says Councillor Pirri, who was just 22 when elected. 'I got into it to make a difference in my community and, over the last eight years looking back, I think I have. I was there to bring a different voice to Council, keep us out of the news. I think we were all pretty proud about being a more or less boring Council.'

'Boring' might be in the eye of the beholder and even if Councillor Pirri thinks his two terms were boring, that doesn't mean that important business didn't get done. Infrastructure, he says, was a top priority and this realised itself over the last eight years with the development of the Joint Operations Centre on Industrial Parkway North, the renovations at the Aurora Family Leisure Complex, beginning work on Library Square, and the purchase and renovation of the historic Aurora Armoury.

'I am proud to have been the leading force in bringing in Niagara College [to the Armoury] and bringing that idea to CEO Doug Nadorozny when he was first hired by the Town,' says Councillor Pirri. 'From a personal perspective, I am also really proud to have served on the FCM (Federation of Canadian Municipalities) Board for four years, eventually getting up to being the Chair for their Environmental Issues and Sustainable Development Committee. To be given that responsibility so young, as well as, to my knowledge, being the first representative from Aurora to sit on the FCM Board is a point of personal pride. I take pride because it wasn't easy, just like being on Council wasn't easy to get elected. It's a competitive process. It took a lot of work and it was a great opportunity to represent Aurora on a national scale. I hope I did a good job and getting that opportunity to communicate with representatives from coast to coast and get a better sense of the difficulties that are shared across Canada is something I am very proud of.'

At the FCM, Councillor Pirri says one of their biggest initiatives was the push for social housing, along with infrastructure. Both, he says, are among the most difficult issues being grappled with by municipalities today. A measure of their success, he said, was getting long-term sustainable funding for infrastructure through the federal gas tax for municipalities to improve roads.

Back at home, Councillor Pirri says he looked at every issue that came to the Council table from a 'Town-wide' perspective, weighing each recommendation and motion on how it would benefit Aurora as a whole rather than specific groups or segments of the community.

'Those votes didn't always make me the most popular guy in Town, but I always felt as though the decisions I made were right for the community as a whole,' he says. 'I was proud of our fiscal restraint over the last eight years, over the last four years, and I think that Councillor Kim and Councillor Thompson were strong proponents of that, so I have no doubt in my mind that that strong fiscal responsibility will continue.

'It is always difficult to say, but my advice would be to make the same decision whether or not the Council Chamber is full of individuals or empty. I think it is incumbent on every member of Council to consider the pros and cons of every item that comes before them and make the decision that they feel serves the community best and I have no doubt in my mind that that is what they will do.

'It has been an honour and a privilege to serve over the last eight years.'