

VIEW FROM QUEEN'S PARK: Humbled & Delighted

Humbled and Delighted to Have Your Support

By Chris Ballard, MPP-elect, Newmarket-Aurora

I am both humbled and delighted to have been voted the new Member of Provincial Parliament (MPP) for Newmarket-Aurora. Campaigning is hard work, but made enjoyable by the opportunity to meet so many nice people and to hear about their hopes and dreams for the future.

I thank The Auroran for this column, which I'll use to keep you updated about my work on your behalf.

I said on election night that my job is to be MPP for all residents of our riding, regardless of whether they voted for me or not. I hold that belief close to my heart.

I was encouraged to see voter turnout in Newmarket-Aurora recorded its highest level, at 54.3 per cent, surpassing the 2011 turnout of 49.3 per cent. I was very encouraged to see schools getting involved and enjoyed my time answering questions from young people.

During the campaign, I was asked countless times why I got into politics. For me, it was because of what was happening to the education system in the 1990s.

My wife and I had three young children in elementary school and we became concerned at the lack of textbooks, broken computers, broken musical instruments, teacher frustration and burn-out.

We saw firsthand how students were being affected by cutbacks and mismanagement at the provincial level. Something needed to be done. Together with other concerned parents, I helped start our school's first School Council to bridge the gap between parents, teachers and school administrators.

We got parents and teachers talking, raised thousands of dollars for the repair and replacement of equipment, and generally tried to make the school a better place for our children and teachers.

Happily, I can report that Ontario's high school graduation rate is now 83 per cent, up from 56 per cent in 2003-04. This means more young people are able to move on to post-secondary education ? which is great news for anyone who believes educated workers are the future of Ontario.

My election priorities for Newmarket and Aurora were shaped after talking to hundreds of residents and businesses, and my work as a Town Councillor.

My priorities are: ensuring our promise of all day, two way, electrified GO Train service between Toronto and Bradford is kept on schedule; local economic development and good paying jobs; and improving protection for the Oak Ridges Moraine, an important environmental feature in both Newmarket and Aurora.

The Liberal government has spent more than \$9 billion updating GO service across the GTA, including almost \$7 billion to buy railway tracks. In Aurora and Newmarket, close to \$50 million has been spent updating parking, lengthening platforms and adding a bus garage.

All it takes is a GO Train trip to Toronto to see progress being made on double-tracking the line. But there is lots more to do if we are to meet our promise of all-day, two-way, electrified service. The provincial budget will be reintroduced in early July and contains provisions to spend \$29 billion on improved transit, including \$15 billion in southern Ontario.

These are staggering sums of money, but required if we are to build a transit system to meet the needs of a growing region ? and transit is much less expensive than expanding existing highways or building new ones.

As chair of Aurora's Economic Development Advisory Committee, and through my years on Council, I heard time and again the difficulty of attracting major companies because of a lack of adequate transit.

Experience has shown that when all day, two way train service is available, companies are more likely to open offices where land is cheaper and municipal taxes are lower. Both Ajax and Oakville are benefitting from improved GO Train service in their areas.

I believe as GO Train, VIVA and YRT service improves in our communities, it won't take long for major companies to discover the benefits of locating here.

In 2015, the provincial government begins a review of the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Act. With that in mind, I have announced my intention to launch a Citizen's Roundtable on the Oak Ridges Moraine. It is important that residents interested in this important environmental feature be informed of the process by which the government will review the legislation in 2015, and be able to make informed input.

It will also be my opportunity to hear what you think so that I can form my input. Stay tuned for details on this initiative.

And, finally, a thank you to retired MPP Frank Klees who served this riding for 19 years. While we may not agree on politics, I commend his commitment to public service and wish him well in his future endeavours.

Please feel free to contact me
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