

VIEW FROM QUEEN'S PARK: Parading, GO Transit, School Investment and more?

By Chris Ballard, MPP

Newmarket-Aurora

Happy Canada Day

It was wonderful to again walk in Aurora's Canada Day Parade. Although there was some rain, the enthusiastic crowds, colourful floats, great music and marching bands ? and cheery parade members ? made it a memorable event. Thank you to the Town of Aurora staff and many volunteers who make the event a success, and to all who paraded down Yonge Street. Most of all, thank you to the great crowds who make it worthwhile. See you next year for Canada's 150th!

Go Transit

Parking congestion in downtown Aurora related to Go Transit users will, hopefully, find some relief when the new GO Train station on Mulock Drive, west of Bayview Avenue in Newmarket, opens in the coming years.

The Mulock station is something I've worked hard to bring to the riding, knowing it will benefit both Newmarket and Aurora residents and businesses. Aurora residents who live in the north-east part of town might find it easier to park at the new station, when it opens, as opposed to fighting for limited parking spaces around the Aurora Wellington station.

Ensuring that Aurora and Newmarket are well served by GO Trains is integral to our community's economic growth. Not only are GO Trains essential for commuters, they open our towns to investment by firms that need to be within close commuting distance of Toronto, but are seeking to expand to towns with lower land prices and municipal taxes.

Along with the new Mulock station, Minister of Transportation Steven Del Duca announced two more GO Train stations on the Barrie GO Transit line. One will be added at Kirby Road in Vaughan and the other at Innisfil in Simcoe County. These new stations are another example of our government honouring our commitment to residents of Newmarket-Aurora in 2014 to improve GO services.

The Barrie corridor will provide travellers with access to all-day, two-way, 15-minute electrified service between Aurora to Union Station, including evenings and weekends, weekday rush 30-minute service between Newmarket to Union Station, and 60-minute service midday.

School Infrastructure Investment

I was delighted to join Education Minister Mitzie Hunter in Vaughan earlier this week to announce our government will invest \$120 million to improve schools in York Region. The funding will enable both the York Catholic District School Board and the York Region District School Board to make much needed building updates and repairs.

This investment in school repair and renewal is part of the largest investment in public infrastructure in the province's history. Our investment of \$160 billion over 12 years will help create jobs ? and build roads, bridges, transit, schools and hospitals. This is an important investment for both our school boards ? one that affects every student. I am proud to support a government that knows a well maintained school creates a better learning environment.

York Region Food Network Grant

I was delighted to make a call this past week to the York Region Food Network (YRFN) in Aurora to tell them they are the recipients of an Ontario Trillium Grant for their Community Cooks program.

This is a new pilot project among YRFN, Belinda's Place and the Aurora Food Pantry, that will offer hands-on experience and job training to 20 women in the area. Working in a commercial kitchen, participants will build skills and confidence while receiving formal training and accreditation in safe food handling, Smart Serve, CPR and first aid.

They will work with a chef to prepare meals, learn about nutrition, food budgeting and menu planning. Their new skills will help support these women in their job searches, and develop food skills and promotes a healthy lifestyle. These skills can be essential to finding employment, as experts tell us more than 60,000 new food and beverage workers will be required by 2020. Congratulations to the York Region Food Network and its partners for this great program!

Combatting child poverty

As part of Ontario's ongoing work to reform income security and combat child poverty, the province is ending the claw back of child support payments from social assistance. Starting in early 2017, child support payments will be fully exempt from social assistance benefit calculations to help increase incomes for families who receive both social assistance and child support. Currently, child support payments are treated as income and deducted dollar-for-dollar from benefits. This change will benefit some of the province's most vulnerable children.

Iftar

I had the honour of attending a Ramadan Iftar (breaking of the fast) dinner on June 18 hosted by the York Regional Police and the Al Nadwa Educational Centre. Ramadan is an exciting annual event that brings together people from various religious backgrounds, not just Muslim, to learn about one another and to celebrate with friends and family.

It was heartening to see so many community leaders, including York Region Police Chief Eric Jolliffe and senior officers. It was an interesting event, and I met local members of the Muslim faith and learned about Ramadan, especially the emphasis on self-improvement and charity.

I invite you to contact me on any issue. Please call my community office at 905-750-0019, or visit my website at www.ChrisBallardMPP.ca. My email is: cballard.mpp.co@liberal.ola.org. I look forward to hearing from you.