

VOTE 2014: 'Balanced growth' is key to Aurora's future, says Council candidate Jeff Thom



By Brock Weir

As the clock ticks closer and closer to the October 27 Municipal Election, Council candidate Jeff Thom knows he probably has the 'busiest few weeks' of his life ahead of him.

In a way, the account executive with a sports marketing company has been preparing for these last few weeks his entire life. Growing up in Aurora with a healthy interest in politics from a very young age, he spent his university career studying political science and history before returning to his Aurora roots to start raising his family.

'A lot of my friends moved down to the city, some moved out of province, but we decided to stay here,' says Mr. Thom. 'I care quite a bit about Aurora and I wanted to get more involved with the direction the Town was going. When you start to move out on your own and start a family, you start to worry about things you never worried about when you were younger.'

In the years since he first got involved in the Town through local sports, including minor hockey, Mr. Thom says he has seen a Town that has grown exponentially. While he sees cost of living and traffic to and from work as some of his changing priorities as he lays the groundwork of his life, he sees the growth of his hometown as something that is going to be particularly challenging in the years ahead.

'I think this most recent Council has been an improvement [over the last] and I think they have done a fairly exceptional job on a number of issues,' he says. 'I don't agree with everything they have done, but they have certainly done a good job. Like a lot of people, growth is [one of my concerns]. This Council has taken an approach I would probably take as well, and I would like to continue that approach to growth. They have had a more balanced approach, and that is mine.'

Looking over several recent battles between the Town of Aurora and the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB) over the last decades, he characterises the 2006 - 2010 Council term's approach to growth as 'combative' rather than 'balanced and collaborative', and it is important to continue on what he sees as an upward swing.

'People want Council to work together to solve the problems of the Town,' he explains. 'They realise they have eight people, plus the mayor, and they are not going to agree on every issue. It is politics, but it seems that bringing a sense of decorum, collaboration, and professionalism back to the Council table is very important.'

?In business you have to work with all sorts of different people. I have dealt with people who have been wonderful to work with and, at the other end, and in business you don't get to choose who you work with, you just have to get things done. If you come to the table with the best interests of the Town at heart, and you are looking to get a job done to move the business of the Town forward, and to make sure people get the services they want, get them at a price they are comfortable with, and everyone is as happy as they can be, I think that is an asset.?

While ?balanced growth? is one of his top priorities in this campaign, his platform is rounded out by three additional planks, including fiscal responsibility towards taxpayers' dollars, protecting the environment which, he says, goes ?hand in hand? with development, and accountable government.

On this last plank, Mr. Thom says he believes this links back to the concept of collaboration around the table. People often shy away from the political process, he adds, because they are not comfortable with the process, or perhaps don't understand the process, and this is something that should be tackled in the name of accountability.

As for the other question on this month's ballot, Mr. Thom says he is personally not in favour of Aurora adopting a ward system, but has no plans to actively advocate on the subject one way or another. Both ward systems and Aurora's at-large systems have their benefits, he says, but a bonus with the current system is candidates and Councillors have to rely on a broad base of support to secure a seat.

?In a ward system, I find you probably get people who are a bit more entrenched in their ward and they are very successful,? he says. ?It is very hard to beat incumbents in that type of scenario.?

Looking ahead to the next four years, one of the biggest challenges he anticipates Aurora will face is development on the east side of Town but, when that is completely filled up, those eyes will be turning to the Yonge Street corridor and the concept of redevelopment. In this case, it will be important to balance the needs of growth within the community, while protecting existing communities.

?One of the things I love about Aurora is all the growth throughout all the growth we have had, we have maintained that small-town character through initiatives like the Farmers' Market,? he says.