

VOTE 2014: Growth will be top of mind if Thompson is re-elected to Council



By Brock Weir

Michael Thompson came into municipal politics from the business world where decisions are, more often than not, made at a much quicker clip and, for him, that was something of an adjustment to make in his first term on Council.

That being said, that did not deter him in the slightest when considering his re-election bid earlier this year and, in fact, might have galvanized his decision even more.

‘If I were talking to a resident and they were asking me about [delays, and items referred back to staff and deferred to a different day] I would say that sometimes it is better to err on the side of caution, to make sure you have all the information in front of you and all the facts before making a good judgement,’ says Thompson. ‘Sometimes it takes looking at it from a different angle to ensure you are going in the right direction.’

‘The problem is we have meetings every week or every second week, so it does impose a lengthy delay [but] one of the things I look for is having more information in those reports that can help us make faster decisions. Those are some of the things we will talk about going forward in terms of better performance metrics, better reports, and more background.’

But that will be up to Aurora voters. In weighing his decision to seek re-election, he says he considered whether his work was comfortable with him continuing on as a Councillor, as well as his family. For him, it is all about striking the balance between all his roles and responsibilities, whether it is around the Council table, in the workplace, or at home.

When he was first elected to Council in 2010, Thompson says he didn't fully grasp everything the job entailed. Despite talking to some incumbents along the way, it is something he says one can never fully grasp until they are there in the thick of it.

‘You want to be a good ambassador for the Town, and I enjoy getting out to the events and supporting them as well, so the time commitment is more than you would expect, but it is such a rewarding endeavour,’ he says. ‘Sometimes I wish I had more time in the day to give to the Town, to get out to events and support the different initiatives that are out there.’

Looking back over the past four years, Thompson says he has found the re-establishment of the Aurora Museum, currently being worked on for the Aurora Room at the Aurora Cultural Centre, particularly rewarding. Not everything, however, has been rosy. Among some of the bigger challenges this Council has encountered, in his opinion, is that slower decision-making process, as well as what he describes as discussions around the Council table where ‘it doesn't appear that we are all working towards the best

interests of the community.?

?At times, it seems decisions are sometimes made based on other factors,? he explains. ?I think everyone has noticed that there seems to be some that vote against everything and others that are trying to move the business of the Town forward. I think we can look at most of the major decisions that came before Council this year, whether it be the discussions around facilities, discussions around the Church Street School agreement, even sometimes with the budget discussions.

?There were discussions about not approving the budget based on specific examples. To me, if you have an issue with one particular thing, you look for a solution, but to reject the budget as a whole [is] something I have trouble with.?

In hindsight, discussions around the recently approved Joint Operations Centre could have been handled better, with more public engagement to better explain ?the need and the cost?. An open house intended to do that seemed to work for some people, but it didn't quite go far enough.

Accounting for the future growth of Aurora is something Thompson says he will keep a keen eye on if re-elected on October 27. With population set to grow extensively through 2021, that will put ?tremendous pressure? on infrastructure and facilities to meet the needs.

?There will always be a need to ensure we're providing great value for the taxpayer,? he says. ?We started the service level review process, we talked about discretionary and mandatory spending, and I want to see us dig deeper into the discretionary aspects to make sure spending is needed, and wise.

?From the first moment of being elected and getting immersed into the role, I treasured it. I feel very honoured to have been elected and I have always wanted to continue to pursue it. In terms of commitment, there is an expectation that each week when you're sitting in front of the Council table you are properly prepared, educated, and understand the issues, working towards a resolution or decision that benefits the community as a whole. I think we all have that responsibility to come ready and prepared.?