

VOTE 2014: Mayor weighs options before seeking a second term

By Brock Weir

With the official start of the 2014 election season exactly two weeks away, Mayor Geoffrey Dawe says there is still a lot to see through as this term winds to a close.

When asked how he would characterise this term of Council, Mayor Dawe says it has been a 'pretty productive' term in moving forward many important municipal items that had either stalled or been delayed before completion. These include initiatives such as the 'youth centre' now underway at the Aurora Family Leisure Complex, as well as laying the groundwork to determine the future use of Library Square.

'That has been a frustrating process for a lot of people and we have been able to at least start that process that has been out there for so many years now,' he says. 'I think we have put good foundations in place for moving forward with, for instance, our reserve fund studies, our 10 year Capital Plan, and some good old business-type projects that are so necessary, but not particularly sexy.

'It helps us plan for our future and be far more productive. If we were to look out for five years, which is what we should be doing, we're moving into a sustainable environment. We have to ensure we have the systems in place that will help us to do that properly.'

During the 2010 election campaign and in the early days of his term, Mayor Dawe said he wanted to change the climate at Town Hall, bringing a civility he claimed had been lacking in the previous term. He said that is something that has been achieved, and a barometer of this is Aurora falling just short of being named a Top 100 Employer.

That, he said, reflects a significant change in the Culture at Town Hall and a momentum he wants to continue now through the end of the Council term in November.

When Council resumes in January, there will be little more than 10 months left, and the checklist is extensive.

'We will have the youth centre done and I think that is a great step forward for some services around Town,' he said. 'We will be on for the Joint Operations Centre and I think that does a lot of things: it puts us into a far more efficient building, it allows us to be far more effective in what we do with our services, and it actually helps us keep an employer in Town because the company we have sold that land to will stay in Town rather than moving out.

'[Another one of my objectives] is a museum based around the Aurora Collection. If we can move forward on that more so than we have in the past, I am looking forward to some steps with that one. One of the interesting things we need to very much consider in this term is getting enough information out there on the ward system so people can make an intelligent selection and an informed decision on the ballot.'

The best way to do that in the next few months, he said, are initiatives like public meetings and information sessions to get that vital information out there. People might have heard about ward systems, but resources need to be out there to help people weigh all the pros and cons before casting their ballot on that referendum question.

While the public should have more information on their electoral future, Mayor Dawe said he is also seeking more information on a personal level.

He is taking this holiday season to weigh all his options before declaring his intentions on whether to seek re-election as Mayor. Aside from his wife, Henny 'obviously a very important deciding factor!' another will be feedback from residents in terms of 'a general sense we have done a good job, a bad job, and if the Town is in better shape now than it was before, and if [Council] is moving in a right direction and providing the services they want at the price they want without the drama they don't want.'

In all, being Mayor has brought its own rewards and challenges. A challenge he found surprising in his early days as Mayor was a sense of always having to be 'on'.

'It is very tiring at the start because you are trying to learn as much as you can and be as helpful as you can, and you have to very quickly come to the realization that you need to depend on a lot of people to help you with these things because it is [difficult] to know all these things at the start,' he says. 'The most rewarding part is the opportunity to work with folks who need help, whether that is the individual, or working with the Salvation Army.

'It has been an incredible learning experience, I can tell you!'

In our next issue, The Auroran checks in with Councillors John Gallo and Michael Thompson.