

VOTE 2014: Pirri to push for new housing options of re-elected to Council



By Brock Weir

Four years ago, Paul Pirri was just 23 when elected to serve as one of Aurora's newest Councillors.

In the intervening years, he says he has learned a lot, but can still bring "very fresh and youthful perspectives" to the issues that face the Town. These last few years have also been a time of professional growth.

While he has served on a number of Town Committees, the most recent being Aurora's Environmental Advisory Committee, he was appointed just a few short months ago as one of the area's representatives on the Board of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM), the advocacy group which fights for the issues of Towns like Aurora at the Federal Level.

It is here, he says, he has honed what has become one of his top priorities if re-elected to Council on Monday.

"Having been elected to that Board and serving on that Board, one of the accomplishments I wanted to get done was to work on affordable housing in Aurora for both our seniors and our youth to make sure that if people want to age in the same community they have the ability to do so," says Mr. Pirri. "A lot of people in my generation are forced to move outside the community due to a lack of affordable housing. Now that I am lucky enough to be on the Board of the FCM, they have a strong track record of advocating for municipalities and on behalf of municipalities on the Federal level.

"One thing I am looking forward to getting done is working with our Federal partners to bring in a long-term strategy for affordable housing."

Looking at the northwest corner of Yonge and Wellington, which is due in the next decade to be transformed into a condominium complex with retail space at street level, Mr. Pirri says there are opportunities to work with developers of such sites to achieve these affordable housing options, whether that includes smaller units or space within buildings specifically designed and designated to be affordable.

"I very strongly believe that Aurora needs to work on affordable housing and this is an avenue I can pursue. I will be going to Ottawa in mid-November to have discussions with both the Government and opposition parties, and individual MPs about the need to address affordable housing. Being a part of this Board allows me to dedicate more time towards those needs in our community."

Housing is not the only need Mr. Pirri sees becoming particularly prevalent over the next four years of the incoming Council. It is particularly important, he says, to get more residents involved in the municipal budgeting process, something he describes as

?participatory budgeting.?

?I would like to see us continue promoting good value for tax dollars, making sure that we are in line with other municipalities using the benchmarking tools that are available to us,? he says. ?If we are high in spending, we need to understand why, and we need to understand what we can do about it without impacting service levels. These all fall under the bubble of putting people before politics.?

A Councillor's job is, in his view, to work with and help people in the community. This was his view when he first put his name forward for election in 2010, and that remains so today. To that end, serving as a Councillor is very much what Mr. Pirri thought it would be, but there have been some surprises along the road. At the most recent All-Candidates' meeting, for instance, he says he was approached by a person who said they would not be voting for him because he ?tried to shut down the Cultural Centre.?

?That was a bit of a surprise to me because I greatly appreciate the work the Cultural Centre Board has done,? he says. ?I think they have done a phenomenal job now and in the past. For someone to come up to me and tell me they have been informed I was trying to shut down the Cultural Centre is an outright lie, and having the facts misconstrued in that capacity surprised me.?

Early in the term, Mr. Pirri and John Abel brought forward a motion to terminate what was the Town's existing agreement with the Aurora Cultural Centre with a view of renegotiating a new agreement. This ultimately evolved into the Town's current agreement with the Church Street facility.

?I am confident we did the right thing for that,? he says.

Looking back over the past four years, Mr. Pirri cites taking issues, such as the development of Aurora's Community Space for Youth, out of Town Hall and into high schools among his most fulfilling achievements ? and the youth space, when complete, will near the top of that list.

?Being 27, I believe I still bring a very fresh, youthful perspective to things,? he says. ?Combined with the experience over the past four years, I think I will continue to play a vital role in the direction of this Council if I am lucky enough to be re-elected.?